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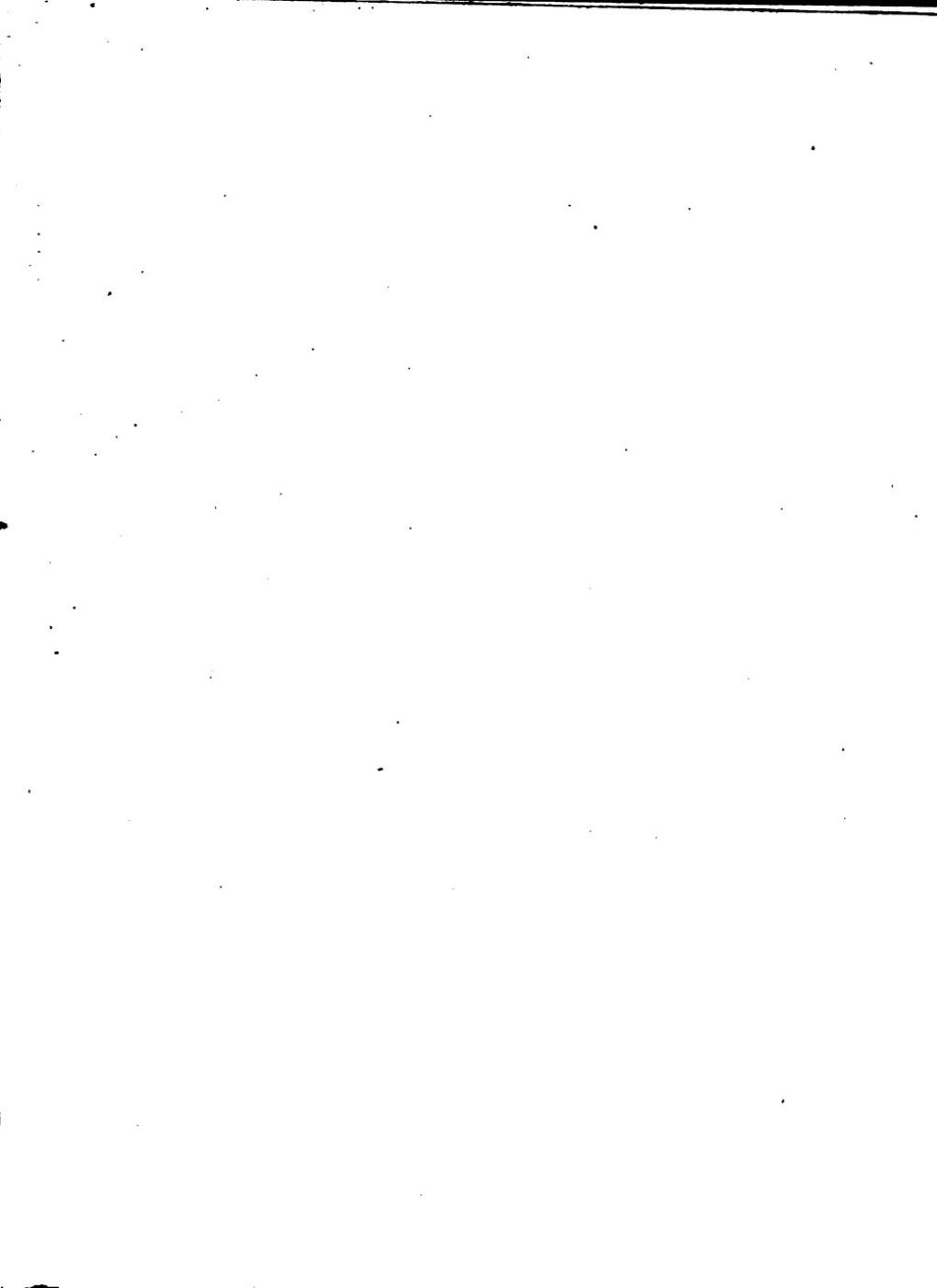
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KIARTAN THE ICELANDER

KIARTAN THE ICELANDER

A TRAGEDY

BY

NEWMAN HOWARD

*Author of
"Footsteps of Proserpine," &c.*



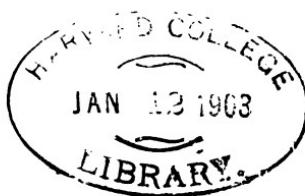
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1902

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LONDON:
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CITY ROAD.

To F. H.

WHEN at one winter's end our boy looked forth
Through wondering eyes upon the glad green earth,
Truly it seemed that in this laughing child
All clouds were pierced, all troubles turned to mirth,
And dawn upon our fields of Enna smiled.

And when this Music dwelt within our nest,
More bird than boy, a five years' fondled guest,
A rose with blushing petals half unfurled,
It was as though the lips of Love had pressed
A kiss upon the bosom of the world.

Yet if the fledgling ailed we held our breath,
Or hid his cheeks in ours, for fear that Death
Watched him as one who watcheth hour by hour
Some rare bud ripen, till one day he saith :
“ Now is it time to pluck the perfect flower.”

But if he smiled, 'twas in such winning wise,
The whole world's joy seemed sparkling in his eyes ;
And if he wept the eyes of all waxed dim :
For still he moved like Morning in the skies,
And zones of light and laughter went with him.

DEDICATION

He is so fair, this little son of ours !
Fresh as cool dew among the meadow flowers,
Swift as blue-breasted swallows on the wing,
Bright as the sunlight chasing April showers,
Glad as the first gold-dappled day of Spring !

His voice, his look, his laughter,—these dispel
All clouds and woes. Oh Time, forbear thy knell !
Wreck not this Music ; spare to this sweet elf
His amaranth wreath, his crown of asphodel,
Fit for the world's one Angel, Love Himself !

KIARTAN THE ICELANDER.



PERSONS.

Men of the	OLAF HOSKULDSON, a chieftain.
	KIARTAN * } his sons.
Dales.	HALLDOR }
	STEINTHOR }
	BOLLI,† Kciartan's friend and foster-brother.
	OSWIF THE WISE, a chieftain.
	USPAK }
	HELGI }
	SNORRI the Priest (<i>Odin's religion</i>), a chieftain.
	THOROD SCATCATCHER, his sister's husband.
	KALF ASGEIRSON, brother to <i>Hrefna</i> .
	GIZUR }
	HIALTI }
	LIOT, the blind skald or poet.
	AN OLD MAN.
	GUDRUN, daughter of <i>Oswif</i> .
	HREFNA, sister of <i>Kalf</i> .
	THORGERD, wife of <i>Olaf</i> .
	THORDIS, wife of <i>Oswif</i> .
	WALA, a little girl.

A Skipper from Norway ; a Thrall from Norway ; Thralls of Iceland ; Guests at Herdholt ; Sailors ; Liegemen of the Chieftains, &c.

* Pronounce Kiärtan.

† Pronounce Bölli.

SCEÑES



ACT I.

HERDHOLT ; OLAF'S SEAT. THE PLAYMEAD.

ACT II.

IN FRONT OF THE TEMPLE OF THOR AT HOLVFELL, THE
SEAT OF SNORRI.

ACT III.

HERDHOLT. THE GUEST HALL.

ACT IV.

HERDHOLT. THE GUEST HALL.

ACT V.

INTERIOR OF A BARN :—Thrown open at the end of the
Act, so as to disclose a great ravine.

Place and Time : Iceland, A.D. 966—1003.

Kiartan the Icelander.

ACT I.

SCENE.—*The Playmead in front of Herdbolt, the seat of Olaf Hoskulson: Broadfirth in the distance. To left youths wrestling in a ring; also a target with the head of Loki, the Evil Spirit,—the mark being his eye. Watching the sports from beneath a birch-grove, Olaf Hoskulson, his wife Thorgerd, and their sons Kiartan, Halldor, and Steinþor, with others of his family; Oswif the Wise, his wife Thordis, their daughter Gudrun, and their sons Uspak and Helgi. Liot, the blind Skald, sits in the background among the birches with his harp. Kiartan sits at the feet of Gudrun, holding her hand. Engaged in the sports, among others, are Bolli, and, as umpire, Snorri, the Priest. Hrefna is seen picking flowers on the green, in company with the little girl Wala.*

Loud cheering as the curtain rises.

Kiartan. Hurrah !

Olaf.

Hurrah !

Oswif.

Humph !

Thorgerd.

Pray, what now, my son ?

Kiartan. Bolli, my foster-brother, shot three arrows
Clean through the eye of Loki.

Tbordis. [To Gudrun] See, my daughter !
Kiartan applauds, but you of the house of Kiallak,—
You, his betrothed, sit calm. 'Tis very sure
I have not taught you so.

Uspak [her son]. That's Gudrun's way.
She thinks herself the golden goddess Freya.
When Master Bolli visits us at Laugar
He gobbles Gudrun with his eyes ; but she
If ever he open his mouth to speak a word
Turns to sour apples, till he bites his lip.
She dubs him " Kiartan's shadow— "

Gudrun. Yea, in sooth!
Easier to snatch the shadow from a man
Than part those foster-brothers !

Uspak. —So, by Thor,
She'd kiss the ground her Kiartan treads upon,
But shies like any filly at his shadow.

Helgi. That's true. She can't abide him.

Tbordis. Fie, my sons !
Now you will shame us all. Dear goodman Olaf,
They do but jest. My daughter, tell him so.

Gudrun. He knows it. Do you not, dear uncle ?

Olaf. Aye :
And like them all the better.

Gudrun.

As for Bolli,

If I say little it is to tease my Kiartan.
 One day mayhap he'll tire of me ; and then
 There's that in hand to feed the dying flame.

Thordis. What ! Make him jealous ?*Gudrun.* Nay, you know not Kiartan.

If you would please him, sing his Bolli's praise.
 That I shall do when grown too old to charm :
 We keep our dearest favours for the last :
 Do we not, Mother Thorgerd ?

Thorgerd. Ah, you rogue !

Kiartan will teach you !

Gudrun. He thinks he does already :
 And so he learns. When maids are taught by men,
 Rivers will travel upward to the hills.*Kiartan.* Flat as a fish sack ! Hurrah ! The third man
 down.*Olaf.* Well wrestled, Bolli !*Oswif.* Hump !*Thorgerd.* Pray, Father Oswif,
 Find me a stool. You great men top us pygmies ;
 We're missing all the play.*Uspak.* Pooh ! It is nought.

Only Bull Bolli tossed a milking Kalf.

Olaf. Ha ! ha ! Kalf Asgeirson to wit.

Tborgerd. Hush, husband !

Yonder is pretty Hrefna, culling flowers
With Wala : Kalf, her brother, is her idol ;
I trust she has not heard you.

Olaf. Yea, goodwife :
That was a churlish laugh. I'll nip my tongue off.

Enter Wala.

Kiartan. Ho, little Wala. Tired of buttercups?

Wala. Hrefna has made a crown for Lady Gudrun,
All of dear goldielocks and water-lilies.'

Tborgerd. For Gudrun, not herself—'tis like the wench.

Wala. Yes, and she tells me tales about a snake,

Named Fafnir. He lay coiled upon a hill,
Guarding a heap of gold, and spitting poison ;
Then came a hero with a sword, and killed him.
What is a snake ?

Kiartan. Hooded,—with fangs and scales,—

Like Snorri, who guards his gold at Holyfell.

Uspak. Oho ! By Thor, that's good ! D'ye hear that,

Helgi ?

Kiartan called Snorri a snake.

Helgi. And folk do say

He wears chain-armour 'neath his jerkin.

Uspak. Scales !

Olaf. Tongues long enough to wag of Snorri, lads,

May twist the gossip's neck.

Oswif. Humph ! That is true.

Uspak. D'ye hear, young Kiartan ?

[*To the guests*] Kiartan called him snake,—
Not I : remember that.

Kiartan. Folk may wot well

I wish the priest no harm ; although one day
'Tis like enough he'll priest us out of Herdholt.

Olaf. Not while I live, nor you, my son.

Kiartan. No, father :

'Tis but my jest : here all of us are friends.

Wala. What is a hero, master Kiartan ? Hrefna says
Sigurd, who killed the snake, was just like you,—
And you'll be a hero some day, so she said.

Gudrun. [To Kiartan] How the child chatters ! What
are you to Hrefna ?

Run away, Wala.

Exit Wala.

Tborgerd. [Following the child with her eyes] Chirrup
chirrup—see—

She flies from bough to bough,—the little sparrow ;
And all that she hears, like Fafnir's birds, she'll blab of.
My star ! She's running straight to goodman Snorri !

Olaf. Kiartan, our son, called Snorri a snake, like Fafnir ;
Sigurd slew Fafnir—Kiartan is like Sigurd.

KIARTAN THE ICELANDER

If she tells all, wife, that is what she'll tell.
Now here's a business !

Uspak.

Loud cheering.

Kiartan. Who flung him ?

Uspak.

Biorn, the Broadwick Champion :
More than your match, young Kiartan, I'll be sworn,
Brag as you may.

Gudrun.

Who has heard Kiartan brag ?

I have not.

Uspak.

No, for when there's aught against him,
All of you straightway sit upon your ears.

I say that Biorn's the strongest man in Iceland.

Helgi. And I say—Kiartan.

Kiartan.

Bolli has met his match ;
And therefore I have.

Gudrun.

So dear Burly says.
Perhaps he has not wrestled with his shadow :
You see the two would always fall together.

Olaf. We talk and talk, but think not. Liot, yonder,

Closes his lips upon a world of thoughts,
His eyes on visions, and on future things.

Liot. [Singing with a great voice]

Weavers, I warn you,
Words are your bobbins :
They go in and out,

Spinning your fates.
 Liot the watcher
 Likes not the pattern.
 Nigh empty the spools are,
 Nigh covered the warp.

Oswif. Humph !

Olaf. Skald, your words are true ! We talk too much.

Tbordis. [To *Thorgerd*] Uncanny folk these Skalds. What think you, Mother ?

Thorgerd. They set me all of a shiver, down my back.

Tbordis. Just as if folk must sit like pines in winter, Dropping a syllable now and then, like snow. So I tell Oswif. All he says is "Humph :" So people call him wise. As for this Biorn, There's talk of him and Thurid, Thorod's wife,— Thorod, scat-catcher hight.

Helgi. Aye, so they call him ; For that he found a shipwrecked Orkney crew, And bade them drown or yield up all their freight : Thus he gan wealth, and wedded Snorri's sister.

Tbordis. So runs the tale.

Halldor. A pair with Snorri ; indeed Their heads are much together at Holyfell. Thorod's a coward. His wife and Master Biorn Make him their sport ; and never a hare so tame.

Gudrun. Laughter has killed more causes than the sword :
If I were Thurid, I'd copy goodwife Unn.

Thorgerd. Unn—goodwife Unn ? I've heard no tale of her.
Gudrun. Minded to change her husbands—for, in sooth,

Those pretty Icefirth ducklings shed their lords
Like birds their feathers,—Unn took thread and
shears

And made his shirt as low, and kirtles long
As any maid's ; then set the tale agog :
“Unn's husband is a woman.” Next, betimes,
While all the roost was tittering, Unn divorced him,
Laughing the noodle out of court. And now,
Being much in love with Rolf, a married man,
She meets him, journeying to the booths, and says :
“ You have heard what folk are saying ? ” “ No,”
says he.

—“Your goodwife rides in breeches, like a man.”—
“First time I've heard it,” answers Rolf. Then Unn :
“It shall not be the last.” Nor was it. So
Once more all Icefirth chuckles ; and betimes
Rolf marries Unn, and puts his wife away ;
Who now, poor soul, found none to fight her battle ;
For all are dead of laughing.

Enter Snorri, amid laughtter.

Snorri.

Now, by Thor,

You fine folk of the Dales are merry men.
Prithee let humble Snorri share your mirth.

Olaf. "Humble," in sooth ! Nay, Priest, we know our betters :

As for our mirth, wherever Gudrun goes
There goes the laughter.

Snorri. Gudrun, gay and stately !

Bows to her.

But what of Kiartan ? The whole field cries for Kiartan.

Herdholt without its hero is, I swear,
Like Hindfell without Sigurd.

Helgi. [Aside] "Sigurd"—"hero" :

Heard you that, Uspak ?

Uspak. Aye : good fat will fizzle.

Tborgerd. [Aside to Tbordis]

My star ! Here's mischief.

Oswif. Hump !

Olaf. Nay, nay, good Snorri :

My son is but a peaceful lad,—no Sigurd :

Though there be witty folk who call him so,—

And just, forsooth, because the boy, like Sigurd,

Weds with one Gudrun. So the tales will roll,

Waxing like snowballs. See the youngster yonder,

Fain of his fair,—no mischief-making Sigurd

But just a stanch home-loving lad.

They talk aside.

Tbordis. [Aside to *Tborgerd*] There goes
 A blood-feud blown away like thistle down.
Uspak. [Aside to *Helgi*] By Thor, a rampant seed is that
 for growing !
Tborgerd. [Aside to *Tbordis*] Aye, that is just my Olaf,—
 peacemaker born.
 Not that there's any wight could hurt our Kiartan,—
 The noble son he is,—so straight and tall ;
 And only yesterday a little lad
 Scaling the cliff for gulls and guillemots,—
 A fish to swim, a falcon on the rocks :
 Taking his clouts and kisses like a man,
 And many a clout to shield another lad,
 Bolli above them all, and ne'er a whimper :
 To you I say it as being one of us
 Now that your Gudrun weds him,—there is not
 A better lad in Iceland.

Tbordis. That is sure ;
 And Gudrun, for all the stately maid she is,
 Mopes after him, when he is out of sight,
 Much like my dappled cow, my pet, my Glossy,
 Lowing, full uddered, when her calf is weaned.
 Well, to be sure, a noble pair they are.

Olaf. [To *Kiartan*] Up, man ! Do Uncle Snorri reverence.
Kiartan rises and bows.

Snorri. Good luck to Kiartan ! Now you come of age,

Young sir, our privilege is to do you honour.
 Pass round the Bragi cup—we'll drink his health.
Tþorgerd. Thanks, Uncle Snorri : I will rouse the thralls.

Exeunt Tþorgerd and Thordis.

Olaf. [To Kiartan] And meanwhile, lad, some play.
Kiartan. None liefer ; but—
Gudrun. Always a but when Bolli holds the field.
Snorri. Afraid of Bolli ?
Gudrun. Nay, good Uncle Snorri :
 Kiartan fears not to give a foe his fall ;
 Only to outstrip a friend.
Snorri. Too squeamish, lad.
Kiartan. By Gudrun's leave, I'll try a turn with Biorn.
Snorri. Said like a hero. Way for Kiartan there !

Enter Bolli.

Kiartan. Hey, man, a tumble ? That's no wonder. Biorn
 Had not, like you, been wrestling all the day :
 All folk could see you were the freshman's match.
Uspak. Some, beside Bolli, draw the longbow nicely.
Bolli. 'Tis more than I saw, Kiartan.

Olaf. Come, and drink.
*Exeunt the men—Gudrun remains ; and in
 the background Liot the Skald at his harp,
 and Hrefna with her flower garland.*

Gudrun. Come, pretty Hrefna : Here am I alone.

Your hands are full of summer, like your smile.

Was ever a wreath so fair ? Who wove it ?

Hrefna.

I :

To deck the dearest brow in Iceland.

Places it on Gudrun's head.

Gudrun.

Mine ?

Oh, thanks ! See, Kiartan looks this way, admiring.

I'll wear it when he drinks the Bragi cup.

Hrefna. Will you ? O, Gudrun, that was all my dream :

To be a fragment of your festival,

A little star out-glistened by the moon.

Queen o' the Dales we call you, dearest Gudrun.

Gudrun. No queen, but only an Iceland girl. Sit here :

If Kiartan in the wrestling take a fall,

Hrefna will cheer me.

Hrefna.

That can never be :

None can throw Kiartan : Kalf, my brother, said it.

Gudrun. That is the truth ; but when I say the like,

My brothers mock me. They are envious men.

Hrefna. [Warmly] How can they help but love him ? All folk do.

Gudrun. Men call you "Dawn" ; I call you "Evening sky."

You glow, and then turn crimson. Do you fear me ?

Think you that I am jealous, like my brother ?

No : for what music makes the air so sweet
As praise of those we love ? Come, tell your doings
At Willowdale, while Kiartan sojourned with you.
He was so happy.

Hrefna. [Brightly] Did he say so ?
Gudrun. Yes.

Ah, little witch, we must beware of you :
You blush again ; and as for Kiartan, he
Harps on your praises like a Skald.

Hrefna. Mine, Gudrun ?
We scarcely spoke. He is my brother's friend.
Kalf, Bolli and Kiartan were together always,
Preparing all their plans.

Gudrun. What plans, dear Hrefna ?
Hrefna. Oh, there is much to do : canvas, and stores,
Arms, and the faring gear—

Gudrun. Is Kalf to be
My Kiartan's groomsman at our wedding feast ?
Kiartan returned to-day : he has not told me.

Hrefna. Nay : will you wed before they go ?

Gudrun. Go whither ?

Hrefna. To Norway.

Gudrun. Do your brothers sail then ?

Hrefna. Soon.

Are they not Kiartan's partners in the ship ?

Gudrun. What ship ?

- Hrefna.* Sure, Gudrun knows ?
Gudrun. Nothing, child, nothing !
- When do they sail ?
- Hrefna.* [Distractedly, as she watches with eagerness the wrestlers] When the wind veers, I think.
Loud cheering from the field.
- There ! Did you see ?
- Gudrun.* I see a web half spun,
 And her that holds the rock.
- Hrefna.* [Excitedly] Kiartan has conquered !
 There is no hero in the world like Kiartan.
 O happy Gudrun !
- Gudrun.* A plot of Asgeir's chickens !
 Hrefna knows all, and I, his own betrothed,
 Nothing ! To gain more time they plan this voyage ;
 They think to win him in the end for Hrefna . . .
 You shall not win him, girl ! Or, if you do,
 He is a man accursed : your deed shall doom him.
 There ! Do you hear ? I swear it by the gods !
- Hrefna.* O, Gudrun, hear me ! I have done nothing : I—
Gudrun. Troll ! I believe you not. You love my Kiartan.
 'Tis scribbled like a rune upon your face.
- Hrefna.* Yes, I do love him ; and the more—
Gudrun. Confess, then :
 You plotted this ; you wish to wed him—
- Hrefna.* False !

I love him dearly. He loves you, not me ;
Therefore I'd liefer die than take him from you !

Gudrun. Liar !

Exeunt Gudrun. *Hrefna bursts into tears.*

Enter Kalf.

Kalf. How goes the little sister ? What ! In tears ?
The idol flouts the offering. . No ? What then ?

Hrefna. [Passionately] O, Kalf ! Make Kiartan stay in
Iceland.

Kalf. How ?
Turn tail, and scuttle ? No, by Thor,—not I.
Your brother is no swerver.

Hrefna. Kalf, we must !
Do that, and I will be your slave for ever.

Kalf. Thralls we have many,—roses in our garth
But one : the roses please us better.

Hrefna [Kissing his hand] Think !
Gudrun and Oswif, Olaf,—all the Dales,—
Will cry on us for snatching Kiartan from them
On the eve of Gudrun's wedding. All will trow
We plot to win him.

Kalf. Let them trow their trows :
An honest man sits firm within his soul :
His conscience is his doom-ring. Other blame
Melts on him like the hail. The choice is Kiartan's :

"Tis he that rides abreast their wordy waves :
Then let him bail the brine he ships : I will not.

Hrefna. Not to please me, Kalf ?

Kalf. No, and it were not ill

If what the golden idol fears came true,
And, in the hurtle of war and wash of waves
His love were clean forgot ; for this I say :
Kiartan may one day rue it that he likes
Better the body of Gudrun than the soul
Of Hrefna.

Hrefna. Me, Kalf ? Why should he care for me ?

Kalf. Because the foolish caring breeds the evil hap,
The wise the good one : that he'll find too late.

Hrefna. O Kalf, meseems you are never fair to Gudrun !

Kalf. That is a winsome piece of woman, but,
Being crossed, belike a woesome. . Here they come.

*Enter a crowd of guests, with Kiartan shouldered as
hero, amid a great shouting.*

The Crowd. Bring forth the Bragi cup ! Hurrah ! Hurrah !
Snorri. Here's to the hero's health.

The Bragi-cup is drunk.

The Crowd. A speech ! A speech !

Kiartan. No Skald am I ; yet hearken all ye lads.

It likes you that my muscles have a grip.

No praise to me : my father wrought them so.

He sailed across the main to Dublin town ;
He found his mother's sire the King Myrkartan ;
He fought, he conquered, gat him wealth and honour,
And, as my grandsire Hoskuld did before him,
He won a kingly pledge to deck his bride :
Thus brewed my Bragi-cup of wealth and fame.
Foam of the waves was in it, and the gale
Sang through his blood to mine. So, lads, we too
Will pass the mead-cup down the board of Time.
No laggard life ! Would ye deserve a bride,
A head of Iceland gold, an eider breast,—
Like sunlight over Snow-fell,—would ye win
A ripple of laughter, a steadfast tide of love
Setting toward the haven of Gimli's Hall,—
A bride, a Gudrun—(nay, by Thor, her like
Is not to win)—then up, and sail the sea !
No laggard life, I say ; but breed ye sons
To make old Iceland's name ring down the world.
Yea : as for me,—by the hammer of Thor I swear
To win a sword, a king's gift like my father's,
And for my bride a token ere we wed,—
Some splendour from the coffers of a king,—
To make her proudest of the brides of Iceland :
That, by the ring of Odin,—that I swear,—
That is the rede for me !

A murmur of surprise, swelling into a loud shout of applause.

Gudrun. Kiartan !

Olaf. What's this ?

Oswif. Humph !

Kiartan. Speak with Bolli, father :

He goes with us and will explain our plans.

I will have speech with Gudrun.

[*To Gudrun*] Dear love, pardon !

A sad year flown is but a night of dreams ;

A sad year looming seems eternal woe :

Therefore I told you not. But now we sail—

Gudrun. O Kiartan ! Now ?

Kiartan. To-night. No weeping, lass :

Speed me with smiles : it is for you I go,—

Lest folk should say the stateliest maid in Iceland

Mates with a mere landlubber.

Gudrun.

Kiartan, stay !

You'll kill me !

Kiartan. 'Sooth, I will be worthy of you.

The year will pass in a curlew flight of dreams,

All fluttering onward to our wedding day.

Gudrun. No, but a dream of death ! Your Viking hordes !

Wolves of the sea—red eyes—jaws dropping blood,—

They grapple ship and fight ! The blinding bow-hail !

The oaths, the groans of dying men,—Oh Kiartan !

The clash of blades, the roar of battle,—Kiartan !

The black waves' swirl and gurgle ! Men drop over,

Thrust on the spear point ! You will cry for mercy :
Dream of the Dales and Gudrun : none ! They
curse you :

“Clear out the ship,” they yell : no quarter ! None !
Up sails and on,—blood in the wake ! They laugh,—
They dab the dead white faces with their oars :
My Kiartan’s ! Oh ! You shall not go ! No ! No !

Kiartan. Hold, lass ! What evil tongue has taught you
this ?

Some lying skipper flushed with autumn ale,
Fain of the tingling terror in your cheeks ?
Olaf and Hoskuld dared the ills ye dread,
And came back scatheless. No stout son of Iceland
But tempers the ruddy iron of his soul
Upon the ringing anvils of the main.
Shall I alone bide languid by the ingle ?
Nay, that would shame you, Gudrun. Curb your
fears ;
Brood not on bogies : I am going, lass.

Gudrun. Then Gudrun shall go with you.

Kiartan. Go with me ?
A maid among the Baresarks ? No, by Thor !
Mind you the distaff.—Mother Thordis, come !
Comfort your daughter.—Friends, I go to graft
Upon the high seat pillars of our hall,
My hall and hers, the red flower warlike fame.

To Norway first ! and those who stay at home
We'll not forget while they remember us :
And pray the Gods may all be here, and hale,
To greet us in a year.

Kiartan. Bolli, and Kalf, the sports are over : come !

There's mickle work to do. First to the ship,—
Then back to Herdholt,—and farewell !

He kisses Gudrun's brow : she clasps his neck imploringly. Exit Kuartan with the guests. Gudrun remains weeping : with Liot in the background.

Liot. [Chanting to his harp]

Now is the playmead noiseless ;
Envy blows at her embers,—
Burns at the base of the bride-hall,
Dimming the eyes of Dawn ;
Glides to his snake-lair, gloating,
Fafnir, and broods on his vengeance ;
Sigurd sails with his Shadow :
The broth of the Norns will brew.

Gudrun. [Who has ceased her sobbing to listen, and now springs up and accosts him impetuously].

Old Skald, you are wise. Help me to save my
Kiartan.

Liot. Draw from the well of Dawn, and let him drink.

Gudrun. Hrefna is called “ The Dawn ” : I loathe the word.

Liot. The fateful Norns sit spinning, and the thread
Unravels from within us.

Gudrun. Speak no riddles.

Kiartan woos peril ; my wooing is undone :
My heart forebodes that this will be his doom.

Liot. [Singing]

Brine-field swept by the blast,
Hold your sailor in haven ;
Deep is the well of the Dawn,—
Balm it shall bear to your bosom.

Gudrun. Hold him in haven ? Yes : I must ! I will !

Liot. [Singing]

Bournes of the sea, what boot they ?
Calm shall come of the captain ;
Love shall keep ye to leeward :
The sea we sail on is soul.

Gudrun. Oh pshaw !

Your words will come to blows, they quarrel so !
“ Hold him in haven,” first you say ; and then :
“ What boots the haven ? ” As for love : what
is it ?

My life ; his pastime. Love will never hold him.
Now be you Gefion’s henchman, friend of maids,
Forestaller of the fates. Persuade him ! Come !
Liot, you shall ! you must !

Liot. [Singing]

Two loves ken I : the earth flame,
 Proud, and hungry of praises :
 Crossed, it shall scorch and consume you,
 Scattering sparks on the wind.
 Love ! Oh the fair love, the sky flame !
 It melts thy soul till it mingles,
 And blends with the spirit beloved.
 So dews from the ocean distil,
 Flowers are born of their falling,
 And saffron dawns and the sunset ;
For love is grand in the losing,
 And glories most in the gift.

Gudrun. Still harping on the Dawn ? I grow aweary !

Songs will not blunt the sword or calm the tempest.

Liot. [Singing]

Not of the ocean's undoing
 Beware, nor of weapons of Vikings :
 The blast and the blade is within you :
 The sea we sail on is soul.

Gudrun. Kiartan will heed your counsel. Come, persuade him.

Enter Hrefna.

Liot. His rede will go the road it set upon.

Flout not the Dawn.

Hrefna.

Dear Gudrun, can I help you ?

All that I am and have is for your comfort.

Gudrun ignores her.

Liot. [Singing]

A song came soft from the Sun-dawn,—
The song of the years of my seeking :
Drops from the boughs of Ygdrasil
Fell like the notes of a viol.
Balder lived, and his bride came,
Singing the song of the secret,—
The love of the fathomless Beauty,
The song of the solving of souls.

Hrefna. Dear Gudrun, do you hear me ? Can I help you ?

Gudrun [rising majestically and tearing the chaplet from her brow]

May Loki, and the Three of Jotunheim
Brand you with flowers of living flame, to mock
These weeds you mock me with !

Hrefna. Gudrun ! The curse !

Exit terrified. Liot rises and feels after her
in the air.

Gudrun. [Imperiously] Go with me ! I command you : go
to Kiartan !

Liot. The song ! The singing girl. Come, follow ! follow !

ACT II.

THREE YEARS LATER.

In front of the Temple of Thor at Holyfell, the seat of Snorri the Priest. Two great images of Thor and Odin. Broadfirth, and the foreshore in view. Feast time : a gathering of the liegemen of Snorri and of Olaf and Oswif, men of the Dales, and their womenfolk : Olaf, Thorgerd, and their sons Halldor and Steinthor ; Oswif, Thordis, and their sons Uspak and Helgi ; Snorri ; Thorod Scatcatcher, his friend ; a Thrall ; a Skipper from Norway, and others.

Snorri. When did you spy the ship, and where ? Speak, thrall.

Folk say you have deceived us.

Thrall. No, my lord :

At dawn I watched it rounding Buland's Head.

Olaf. Belike, it beaches not at Thorness Haven,
But makes for Daymealness. Wot you past doubt
The ship was Kiartan's ?

Tbrail.

'Twas the ship he sailed in

Three years ago, from Burgfirth—for the prow
Bore the same figurehead.

Olaf.

That's passing strange.

My son well knows the honour due to Thor :
No gaping mouth from any keel of his
Would mock the sprites that guard the home of gods.

Halldor. There's mickle talk of Tryggvason, the king,
Twisting all folk to take a brand-new faith.

Olaf. Hoots, man ! That's not for Kiartan : he is rock,—
Firm for the faith of Thor and Frey and Odin.

Thorgerd. Look yonder, husband ! What has Gudrun seen ?
Gold hair agush, the sunlight on her face,
Downhill she trips, with feet as light as Freya's,
Singing, "The twilight of the gods is past."
Come, meet her.

Exeunt Thorgerd and Olaf.

Steintbor. Ho, thou Skipper out of Norway :
What is this Faith they clack of ?

Skipper. Thor no longer.
They sign a cross, and eat the flesh of gods,
And sprinkle folk with water.

Helgi. An their gods
Spare us the sprinkling while the hay is mown,
I'm for the cross, and let Thor's hammer rust !

The gods are gluttons of our gifts, I say :
 They sit aloft with goggle eyes, and grin,
 And give back shells for shillings.

Halldor. What of Snorri ?

We sprinkle him with Temple dues enow ;
 But let the new Faith come, the Priest goes fishing !
 They'll try no fall with Snorri.

The Skipper. Aye, but they will :
 The King of Norway backs them.

Helgi. Wait for Snorri.
 Who ever found him tumbled in a ditch ?
 He'll writhe, he'll wriggle : come again, and lo
 He basks in sunlight on a bank of flowers.

Halldor. Oho, the snake ! you mind what Kiartan said ?

Helgi. Mark me, I say no word against the priest :
 He is our very good friend.

Steintbor. And ours no less.—
 What will he do then, think you, if the Faith
 Come, as they cackle ?

Helgi. Snorri makes his bargain.

Halldor. That's if he can. But now, it seems to me,
 When Kiartan is home again and wed with Gudrun
 Your sire and mine will take the helm together
 And have chief word in all things.

Helgi. Wait for Snorri.
 Enter Gudrun breathless, Olaf and Thorgerd bebind her.

Gudrun. The thrall spake true : from yonder knoll I saw it,—

I saw the ship ashore in Holy Creek,
I saw the figurehead, I saw the flag !
Oh Mother— Father—kiss me ! Kiartan comes !
I threw a kiss, and Kiartan—Kiartan caught it !
An hundred folk all digit with warlike gear
March on the foreshore round the Ness, and one
Clad in red kirtle leads the van, and bears
A banner : that is Kiartan. Two behind him,
Kalf Asgeirson and Bolli, march abreast.
Give me the sword Footbiter ! Oh my father,
Here, at the foot of Odin's pedestal,
My hero shall receive it from my hands. . . .
Hark !

Hymn in the distance.

Vexilla Regis prodeunt,
Fulget crucis mysterium,
Quo carne carnis conditor
Suspensus est patibulo.
Quo vulneratus insuper
Mucrone—

Alarmed by the unwonted strains, the men draw their swords ; the women and Thorod Scatcatcher fly for refuge to the Temple ; Gudrun alone remains with the men. Enter, after a pause, the Monks Gizur

and Hialti, with crew and thralls from the ship ; many carrying rich shields, war gear, crosses, and religious apparatus ; at their head Bolli in a red kirtle, with the Banner of the Cross. Seeing the drawn swords of the Icelanders, Bolli immediately casts his on the ground ; and on both sides the example is followed. At a sign from Gizur the hymn ceases, and Bolli, yielding the banner to a bystander, steps forward and embraces Olaf.

Bolli. Hail, foster-father !

Olaf. Bolli, my son !

Gudrun. Oh, where is Kiartan ? Speak ! He is dead !

Bolli. He is well,—

Kiartan is well.

Gudrun. Where is he ?

Bolli. Not with us.

The King of Norway keeps him.

Gizur. [Prompting him aside] Say "The Princess." They sign to one another.

Bolli. [To Gudrun] Your pardon : be at ease ; Kiartan is well.

Gizur and Bolli withdraw, and speak by the image of Thor ; Gudrun converses eagerly and anxiously with the Dalesfolk ; Hialti marshals the crew.

Gizur. My son, say not the King holds Kiartan hostage.

Bolli. I shall not say the Princess loves him.

Gizur. Listen :

The King said “ Bluff not Iceland : coax and lead it,
Speaking of Kiartan as my friend, not captive.”

Iceland’s a bull-whale taken in the snout,

A gannet when the net is spread with care :

“ Hostage ” sounds ill ; the word makes war on
friendship.

A time may come for threats : it is not now.

But here’s the tale of Kiartan and the Princess

Ready to hand, most flattering to your folk,—

Ha, ha ! And true as *credo*.

Bolli. Lies !

Gizur. Well, well :

When tales go to thy tally, why destroy them ?—

Besides, your Gudrun is fair : you love her.

Bolli. Ah !

How know you that ?

Gizur. I read two languages :

Latin and—love-looks.

Bolli. Kiartan is my friend,—

More than my brother,—and betrothed to Gudrun :

Gizur. Little he’ll care ; and she is—well, a woman.

Bolli. We wrestle fair in Iceland.

Gizur. What—in love ?

A pause : Bolli is silent.

You vowed to aid the Faith, and Kiartan vowed it.

I pray you weigh the Cross against a scruple.

Bolli. Thrice Kiartan saved my life.

Gizur. And Christ your soul.

Bolli. When we were lads—

Gizur. Sow not to reap the past.

The future is yours,—and Gudrun's.

Bolli. Tempt me not.

Bolli betrays not Kiartan.

Gizur. This do at least :

Conceal the cause that keeps the lad from Iceland,

While we conceal the love the Princess bears him.

Bolli. To that I agree. . . .

Gizur. There's one behind the pillar !

Come !

*They mingle with the crowd. The Icelanders
eagerly examine the treasures of the Christians.*

*Thorod Scatcatcher creeps out of concealment
behind Thor's image, and touches Snorri on the
shoulder. They go aside.*

Snorri. Eh ? Where have you been ?

Thorod. In hiding, master :

Liked not their looks. No danger now ? Eh, master ?

Snorri. Dastard !

Thorod. Hiding, I found a pretty egg.

Say, shall we hatch it ?

Snorri. Not the time for riddles !

Tborod. Bolli and Kiartan take the Christian faith,

And so must all in Iceland, says the King.

Kiartan is held as hostage. Whoop, my master !

A canny sport ! The princess tickles him
To love her.

Snorri. Ha ! And he ?

Tborod. That's dark. Belike

He cleaves to Gudrun. So thinks Bolli ; but,
Says Gizur, "Here's your chance, young Bolli."

Snorri. Ha !

And he will take it ?

Tborod. No. And why not, master ?

Think you he fears they'll nip him 'neath their
thumbs.

Snorri. That, or a scruple. Belike the shavelings wish it.

He is their staff, and climbers like a grip.

Tborod. He must not have these scruples, must he, master ?

Snorri. Tell on.

Tborod. He loves the wench.

Snorri. That is no news.

Think you I have the day to waste on tattle ?

Tborod. "Tattle" ! Are these the thanks I get ? Why,
master,

Here is the egg we've looked for, three years past.

Now can we hatch an earthquake in the Dales.

Whoop, master ! Olaf, Oswif, Kiartan, Bolli—
 Dusk of the gods of Saelingsdale and Herdholt,
 Boon friends they must not be, now must they,
 master ?

Nay, they shall fight like puffin-cocks. Then, whoop !
 Up goes the star of Snorri, down goes Olaf.—
 Shall Thorod teach his master ?

Snorri. Teach the trolls.

Tell on.

Thorod. This way. I love the Temple shades.

Exeunt into the Temple.

Hialti. [Addressing the throng]

Men of old Iceland, blest among the isles,—
 For here, before our fathers fled the war,
 The Dove of Peace had lit,—to you, my kindred,
 Tryggvason, King of Norway, greeting sends,
 Holding your friendship dear ; and bids you take
 A gift above all gifts,—not this poor shield,
 Enchased with gold and ivory, though in sooth
 This also is yours [*murmurs of approval*],—but water
 blest of Heaven,
 Whose sprinkling wards the faithful from the trolls,
 From evil eyes and pestilence, and hags,
 Whereby your land is ridden,—most of all
 From trolls and elves that haunt the hearts of men,
 And run and writhe within you, tug your troth,

Stiffen the lip of pride, and twist the sneer,
 Pull down the mouth in dudgeon and disdain,
 Make eyes that lour and lure, and venomous tongues,
 Lips white with wrath, and teeth on edge with anger ;
 The pillars of the peaceful home they sap,
 Clang-to the door upon the ill-clad guest,
 Stir up the feud of kin, and stain the board
 With blood of hate, not wine of fellowship :—
 Trolls, fetches, sprites are these of lust and pride,
 Pride of the purse and vanity of power,
 Rankling of envy, spite, revenge, and malice :
 All which the holy water exorcises,

When faith goes with the taking : try ! Come try !

Voices of the Tbrong. Me, master !—Me !—My cow's bewitched—My thrall has the blue sickness.—Give it to me.—No, me ! My mother-in-law has the evil eye.—Me ! Me ! A gaberlunzie man has cast the eye of glamour on my girl.—No, me !—Me ! First !

Hialti. But all must trow the faith of Christ, and swear
 Upon this cross—

Olaf. Ho, treason ! Out, ye varlets !
The tbrong sbrinks back afraid.

We swear upon the mallet-sign of Thor.

Traitors will deal with Olaf. Where is Snorri ?

*Enter Snorri, from out of the Temple,
 with Thorod Scatcatcher.*

Snorri. I bow to Olaf.

Olaf. Nay, Priest : this is for you ;

But as for me, I say, lend them your ear,

But toss them not your soul.

Hialti. I ask no more.

We came in peace to bring the cross of peace.

For now Redemption cometh—now the world

Shakes off the sable robes of death and doom,

To wear the snow-white garments of the Church.

And how shall these things be ? Behold the Cross !

*Holds up a richly-wrought crucifix. The throng
crowds round and admires it.*

Snorri. [Aside to Gizur] This way, my friend ! I like
your faith enough ;

And it may hap I help you. Ah, you know me ?

Yea, we are Snorri, the priest. We take the dues.

More of that afterwards. But now one word

Concerning Kiartan. Pray confide in me—

Exeunt into the Temple.

Hialti. [To the throng]

Grew from the floor and fount of things a tree,

Ygdrasil, rooted deep in Time and Space :

Its sap is life, but thereon hung a fruit

Whose juices raging in the blood and brain

Bring feuds and envy, pride and evil lusts :

Thereof our primal parents ate and fell,—

And still the poison gallops in your veins :—
For Reptile Nidhug tempted them and swore
To wash us drunk with venom of our vice
Down to the pit of Nidheim. Woe ! ah woe !
What power shall save us ? Odin, so ye tell,
Hung on the tree for many days, and offered
Himself to himself : but what good gat ye thence ?
Envy and feuds still flourish ; king and franklin
Snatch at their neighbours' lands, and black revenge
Boils in the stream of blood from sire to son.
No peace ! No light in darkness ! Who redeems
us ?

What blood-wite shall atone for all your scores ?
Kin, I will tell you. Out of Mary's womb,
In the land of the rising sun, by Micklegarth,
Sprang the sweet fruit whereof the faithful eat :
Flesh and the blood of God made man for us :
Grafted upon Ygdrasil, tree of life ;—
Yea, as we graft sweet apples on the sour,
Man on the Beast, and God on Man were grafted,
When Mary's son was nailed upon the tree.
Behold him on the shield ! He poured his blood,
Pierced with the god-nails, that the envenomed veins
Wrought to all lust and ravine might be healed,
And war and envy cease, and all men eat
Their bread in love and fellowship and peace.

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Pierced with the god-nails, that the envenomed veins
Wrought to all lust and ravine might be healed,
And war and envy cease, and all men eat
Their bread in love and fellowship and peace.

They gather round the shield again : he shows them crosses, pictures, etc. Meanwhile Snorri has been bargaining aside with Gizur for thralls carried by the ship.

Gizur. [To Snorri] This one is fairest spoken, being by birth
No slave. At Thrandheim Point he came aboard
Pursued, and gat our help at price of thralldom.
Ten crowns will buy him.

Snorri.

Done !

Hands money. Then to the slave :

And now, my man,

Like ye your freedom ?

Tbrall.

Aye, my lord.

Snorri.

Then buy it.

Tbrall. Alack, I have no silver.

Snorri.

Speech is silver.

The wise tongue buys its freedom with a tale.

Listen !

They go aside.

Hialti. [To the throng]

This is the holy water, this the Dew
Fallen from Ygdrasil's branches when the Christ
Hung on the tree : and he who takes it, dies not.

*He invites the crowd, but, fearing Olaf's authority,
they bang back.*

A Bystander. What say you, Olaf ?

Olaf.

Wholesome rede is that
Of sinking pride and blood-feuds : though belike
Justice is daughter of indignant wrath
As Worth is son of dignity and pride ;
But here methinks those sires have gat a squint,
And borne an ugly offspring. Let that be.
Says Liot all are kin, all equal born,
And wrong to one is wrong to all the world.
A wise word that : and these folk say the like.
Hear them. But nought in haste ! Ye have my rede.

Hialti. For evening waits the idler's suit, ye say,—
And hell for those who tarry. But, to our theme !
Cease from revenge. Wrong is not cured by wrong.
Like lusty fowls ye men strut forth to fight,
And as the cock crows o'er his vanquished foe
Ye sing defiant skald-songs ; but the Norns
Spin, spin, and sing—hard twisted songs of fate,
And brew, of the bitter blood ye shed, your bane.
For sour blood breeds the sour, and sweet the sweet,
As corn grows corn, and thorn bears only thorn.
So, with the bitter blood of Odin, ye
Mark board and altar and your breasts : but I
Mark you with blood outpoured by Him who gave
Not good for good and ill for ill, but good
For evil : cheating so the Norns and brewing
Sweet blood to kill the sour ; and sing the song

That melts all janglings into harmony ;
 And as some purer light than ours may pierce
 Flesh, so that song of utmost Love goes beating
 Up at the bars of Time and Space, and throbs
 To eternity, our souls upon its wings.

Olaf. Peace unto men-folk is no easy rede.

The man speaks wisely. But beware of haste :
 Not lightly folk should change their fathers' faith.

*Enter Snorri and Gizur, smiling in amicable
 understanding.*

A Bystander. Aye ! Aye ! And when the scurvy South-
 land folk

Took well the outlandish faith, full well they rued it.
 For lo, a rumbling underground, a roar
 Of bellows, and the earth belched forth in flames !
 Thor at his stithy, mark ye ; and their hay
 Was swallowed by his vengeance.

Snorri. Tut, good fellow !

Did never the hills smoke till the new Faith came ?

The Bystander. Let sleeping dogs lie sleeping, so say I.

The Skipper. Trow ye that Thor, denied, will wreck your
 crops ?

When Tunsberg folk denied the Christ, the King
 Burnt in their barns—not hay, but heathens !

Olaf.

Ha !

Gizur. [To *Bolli*] Mark ye the evil that I feared ? Yon chieftain [Pointing to *Olaf*]

Rears like a swancock threatened.

[To the throng] So the King

Did to his enemies, not to you, his friends.

Olaf. Hey, but yon fluty fellow said your God
Would have us fair to friend and foe alike.

The Skipper. When Eyvind asked the King to sacrifice
On the altar of Thor the King laughed loud and said,
“ Catch me an ass, and I will sacrifice it ” :
Whereon his men seized Eyvind, and the King
Slaughtered him in the God-home.

Olaf. Ha !

The Skipper. And when
Jarl Raud refused the Christian faith, the King
Bade strap him on a board, and gagged his jaw,
And thrust along his throat a hollow reed,
And with a burning coal forced ling-worms down it,
Which ate their way out through him ; so the King
Slew Raud who would not take the Christian faith.

Olaf. Out with the knaves ! We'll none of them I say ;
Nor of their damnèd faith, their lies and murders !

Hialti. Kindred—

Olaf. Begone !

Bolli. Good foster-father—

Olaf. You,—

Are you also a traitor to your father's faith ?

Bolli. No traitor, but a truster of the Christ ;
 And not from dread or durance ; but even so
 It came about, that, when in Thrandheim fiord,
 We men of Iceland planned to kill the king,
 And were convicted, being condemned to death,
 Life, like a flood of sunlight in a dungeon
 When first the door is flung, streamed in upon us,
 And on the flood the knowledge of the Faith :—
 The king we wronged had ransomed us ; and gladly
 From him we took the ransom of the Cross :
 And, would that all did likewise.

Olaf. Now, by Thor,
 The sign o' the cross is symbol of cross purpose ;
 Or here's a king of contrasts.

Hialti. Tides of sin
 Wash in the soul, but Faith shall fight the flood.

Olaf. When many voices war the song is slain,
 And none shall know the tune. But more anon.

Gizur and Hialti talk with Snorri. *Olaf*
turns from the throng to Bolli.

My lad, I take it ill ye say no word
 Of Kiartan.

Snorri joins the group, listening respectfully.

Bolli. Ask me not : my lips are sealed.

Olaf. Here's Gudrun with her blue eyes drenched in tears :

Comfort the lass, I pray you.

Bolli. He is well.

Thorgerd. There, child, you hear : all's well.—It cut her soul
That Kiartan left so lightly, and now she says
He never truly loved her : but I say
That was to spare her pain. The lad is faithful :
Assure her, Bolli.

Bolli. That is Kiartan's nature.

Gudrun. Hear him ! He shirks it. Oh, they treat me well !
Three years and never a word. Some men, belike,
Can wag their heads and mock, with necks in hiding.
Great is the house of Oswif, O my kindred,
That can afford to take such scorn so lightly.

*She looks at her brothers : then turns sharply to
Bolli :*

Confess : he loves another.

Bolli. Think it not.

Gudrun. If you and he had tails, you'd stand like mules
Swishing the flies each from the other's nozzle.
Be sure I like you for it ! Tell me then :
Why does he send no word, no pledge, no token ?

Bolli hesitates.

Snorri. Well, by my troth, good Olaf, if a friend
May speak without offence,—good Bolli errs ;
And nobly errs, defending one he loves.
Not that I blame your Kiartan. None should yield

His hand to one while others hold his heart.

Olaf. Ho ! what is this ?

Snorri. Nothing but what ye know.

Olaf. Of Kiartan ? Nought !

Snorri. Then I do wrong to speak.

Olaf. Out with it, man ! I'll not be hoodwinked.

Snorri. Nay !

What should I know ? It is mere talk I wot of.

Ill tides are they that bear a friend ill tidings.

Though some might think alliance with a king
An honour even to Olaf.

Olaf. What is this ?

Snorri. Belike—who knows ?—the tale is false. And yet—
Kiartan's a catch for any—

Gudrun. Oh ! It is true :

He is wedded ! I am lost !

Bolli. [To *Snorri*] Who told you this ?

Gudrun. [To *Bolli*] You guessed—you knew it : that was
why you quibbled.

Tbordis. He wished to spare you : do not blame him,
Gudrun.

Olaf. [To *Bolli*] Speak ! Is this true ?

Bolli. They talk ! They talk !

Snorri. See yonder :

Is that man or your crew ? Any will serve :

The talk is general.

Bolli.

A runagate :—

He joined the ship at Thrandheim Mouth for refuge.

Snorri. No, no, my friend, you keep not truth at bay :

It pounces. He is to hand ; we'll ask him. Here, man !

Came you from Nidoyce with the ship ?

The Thrall.

Nay, lord.

I ran o'er-land for succour, and they took me.

Thorgerd. Bolli speaks truth, you see.*Snorri.*

Well, I am wrong.

[To the Thrall] So then you know not Nidoyce ?

The Thrall.

Aye, my lord.

I ran from Nidoyce.

Snorri.

There the Princess dwells.

The Thrall. Aye, thank the lord ! The bustle of her feast

Covered my flight.

Snorri.

What feast ?

The Thrall.

Her wedding.

Snorri.

Whose ?

The Thrall. Lord Kiartan's, with the Princess Ingibiorg.

Consternation—amid which Gudrun is led away.

Bolli. [Aside to the Thrall] From Nidoyce to the Thrandheim Mouth,—say, thrall :

How far is that by land ?

The Thrall.

Full thirty leagues.

Bolli. The firth is less. We sailed it in a day.

You quitted Nidoyce later, and outstripped us ?

Snorri. I bow to Olaf.

Olaf. Nay, Priest : this is for you ;
But as for me, I say, lend them your ear,
But toss them not your soul.

Hialti. I ask no more.

We came in peace to bring the cross of peace.
For now Redemption cometh—now the world
Shakes off the sable robes of death and doom,
To wear the snow-white garments of the Church.
And how shall these things be ? Behold the Cross !

*Holds up a richly-wrought crucifix. The throng
crowds round and admires it.*

Snorri. [Aside to Gizur] This way, my friend ! I like
your faith enough ;
And it may hap I help you. Ah, you know me ?
Yea, we are Snorri, the priest. We take the dues.
More of that afterwards. But now one word
Concerning Kiartan. Pray confide in me—

Exeunt into the Temple.

Hialti. [To the throng]

Grew from the floor and fount of things a tree,
Ygdrasil, rooted deep in Time and Space :
Its sap is life, but thereon hung a fruit
Whose juices raging in the blood and brain
Bring feuds and envy, pride and evil lusts :
Thereof our primal parents ate and fell,—

And still the poison gallops in your veins :—
For Reptile Nidhug tempted them and swore
To wash us drunk with venom of our vice
Down to the pit of Nidheim. Woe ! ah woe !
What power shall save us ? Odin, so ye tell,
Hung on the tree for many days, and offered
Himself to himself : but what good gat ye thence ?
Envy and feuds still flourish ; king and franklin
Snatch at their neighbours' lands, and black revenge
Boils in the stream of blood from sire to son.
No peace ! No light in darkness ! Who redeems
us ?

What blood-wite shall atone for all your scores ?
Kin, I will tell you. Out of Mary's womb,
In the land of the rising sun, by Micklegarth,
Sprang the sweet fruit whereof the faithful eat :
Flesh and the blood of God made man for us :
Grafted upon Ygdrasil, tree of life ;—
Yea, as we graft sweet apples on the sour,
Man on the Beast, and God on Man were grafted,
When Mary's son was nailed upon the tree.
Behold him on the shield ! He poured his blood,
Pierced with the god-nails, that the envenomed veins
Wrought to all lust and ravine might be healed,
And war and envy cease, and all men eat
Their bread in love and fellowship and peace.

*Bolli.***Hear me, Gudrun !**

All day I'd sing you skald songs, hold your rock,
 Harp to you, win you riches, robes, and jewels,
 Sit at your feet, or plait your golden hair,
 Wrestle or run or dance to make you happy,
 Be as a king to all the world, to you
 A bond-slave,—might I only live for you,
 Not die because you scorn me.

*Gudrun.***A mad world, Bolli !**

When Kiartan wooed he spoke not half so fair ;
 So well you love ! So faithful in your love !
 So faithless he ! Yes,—you deserve right well :
 Yet all you say I would have done for him
 Sooner than trouble to thank you for the like :
 But then you see I hate you.

*Bolli.***Hate me then :**

But give me leave to love you.

*Gudrun.***You might do more.***Bolli. What ?**Gudrun. Wed me.**Bolli.***Gudrun !***Gudrun. It is a mad world, Bolli.*

*Bolli. Mad ? Aye it rocks, it dances ! All the grass
 Sings and the birds are clapping wings like hands ;
 The waves are laughing children, and their foam
 Locks flung in revel ; and I am king o' the feast !*

What are they doing yonder ? Moulting Faiths ?
Fools ! all their gods are puppets, all their creeds
Rags ; but the god that sits among the stars
Is Love ! For him the sun glows, and the flowers
Flame, and the white clouds frolic with the moon.

Gudrun. Dear, you will try to win me.

Bolli. [Seizing her rapturously] That word again !

Gudrun. Not now ! No ! Loose me ! I hate you.

Bolli. Say it ! You shall !

“ Dear ! ” Pout your lips upon that word.

Gudrun. Not now :

Some day—perhaps.

Bolli. When ? Oh, I will take Life
And crush its essence in my hands to wring
That drop again !

Gudrun. There is another way.

Bolli. What ? How ?

Gudrun. No matter. . We shall see.

Tbordis approaches : Gudrun beckons ber.

Dear mother,

Bolli and I have settled it. He weds me.

Tbordis. Olaf and Thorgerd, Oswif, Snorri,—listen !

Here be strange tidings !

Snorri and the Dale folk gather round.

Gudrun marries Bolli !

*T*hey all withdraw talking.

Liot. [With his harp]

O white strong temple of wisdom,
 Brow of the beautiful Balder,
 The bane-weed smote thee to bleeding ;—
 Flung thee in torrents of Niflheim
 The lord of the vengeful,—Loki.
 Sinking, rising, I saw thee,
 A white flower drenched in a whirlpool,
 A star in the wrack of a storm.

*Snorri quits the group of the Dale folk
 and joins Gizur and Hialti.*

Snorri. How fares the preaching ?

Gizur. Thanks to yon chieftain, ill.

Hialti. Alack, they marvel at the gold upon the shields
 More than the good news of the God of Peace.

Gizur. Some say that folk who wrought such princely gear
 May wot of things unknown to simple folk ;
 Therefore they take it well : but this they trow :
 Thor of the golden head that sits up yonder

Pointing to the idol.

Looks on askance, and has an evil deeming.

Snorri. There is a cure for that : a word with you !

They whisper.

Liot. [With his harp, singing]

Fastest of friends and of lovers,
 Balder the bright and the brave,

Oh, that a weed should undo thee,
 When all the blossoms were thine !
 Rend the suckers, destroy them,
 Oh, willow and wonder of women !—
 Poison lurks in the pride-weed,
 Cause of the weeping of gods !

Snorri. [Audibly] As to the Temple dues ?

Gizur. Yours, as before.

Snorri. Iceland being christened, Kiartan is released ?

Gizur. We vow it.

Snorri. Both for his kindred's sake and yours
 Utter no word of his captivity.

Gizur. All things we promise for the King and Church.

Snorri. And I as Priest, for Iceland, vow to take
 The Faith of Christ and let the land be christened.

Gizur. Speedily ?

Snorri. At the wedding feast of Bolli.

Gizur. Snorri is father of the Faith in Iceland.

Snorri. I take no praise : this favor only I ask—
 My share in this is now and for ever secret.

Hialti. Said nobly.

Gizur. Sir, I understand : and promise.

Snorri. Now win the folk, and luck be with you, friends.

Gizur. [Walks to the knoll fronting the image of Thor, then
 turns to the throng, and addresses them loudly]

Forasmuch as some of you have dread of Thor,

Fearing a visitation on the land,
 Now hearken, Iceland ! If your gods be true,
 Here let them strike me dead, and all ye folk
 Cleave to the ancient faith. [Turning to the *idol*]
 Come down, old Thor !

Thou of the slouch hat and the squint eye—Strike !
A pause.

Ho ! sit'st thou there to hear us mock and flout
 thee ?

Strike if thou canst ! Down with thy hammer, Dog :
 Make mountains flame and thunder rock the welkin.

Another pause.

What ! Art thou mum ? Old tramp, old mallet-paw,
 Shall then a Babe of Bethlehem master thee,—
 Gather thy thunders in his little fist,
 And hold thy hounds in leash, to lick his palm ?

Pause.

So ! will ye skulk, ye mongrel sons of Odin ?
 Stir, wake and strike, old fox, old wolf o' the sea ?

Draws near the image.

I twig thee by the nose,—I spit upon thee.
 Hast thou no grit, no rage, no wrath, no ruin ?
 Thou block, thou bane of flies, thou worm-house !
 Belly of rats and toads, spew forth thy vermin !
 In the name of Christ I bid thee rock and tumble.

Strikes at the idol: it totters to the earth; all manner

*of vermin crawl out. The people, biterto
showing signs of fear, now shout and laugh.*

The Throng. Hail to the Christ ! Down, down with Frey
and Odin !

Snorri. [Aside to Thorod]

What think ye of that, old pirate ?

Thorod. Whoop, my master !

None like the priest for hatching eggs in season !

That was well thought of,— bidding break the image.

Dusk o' the Dale-gods ! Olaf's star shall set :

The king is ours ; the folk will turn against him ;

There will be games when Kiartan comes again,

After the wedding ;—after, it shall be ;

And when the tale is told, what man shall know

Who found the egg and hatched it ? Whoop, my

master !

ACT III.

SCENE.—*Herabolt, the seat of Olaf Hoskuldson : the Guest Hall. The wainscotting is painted with legendary pictures, and the words of Ulf Aggason's poem thereon. Tapestries screen the fire-ball in the rear. Benches to right and left, and a central high seat with pillars and a canopy on both. That on the right is elevated above the other, and of a more imposing structure. In the middle of the ball is a swearing stone. Olaf sits with a drinking horn before him ; Thorgerd, his wife, beside him.*

Thorgerd. Now they are wedded, and the feast is over,
Tell me, Olaf, what thought ye of Bolli ?

Olaf. Freakish ;

His humours passed my fathoming.

Thorgerd. And mine.

Did ye not note those glooms and cloudy ways ;

And how he snatched his joy in savage bursts,—

A baresark mood unlike his boyish wont :

Strange in a man about to wed !

Olaf. Aye ! Aye !

Thorgerd. And such a bride ! I call it quite uncanny !

Poor man ! And how he ate her with his eyes,—
Just as of old,—and she a lump of ice !

Olaf. The ends of her mouth curl downward now, I notice.

Thorgerd. Well, well : he has the wife he pined for.

Olaf. True.

Thorgerd. These Christian weddings little suit my taste.

They'll bring the bride no luck.

Olaf. Nor us, I'm thinking.

Thorgerd. Our hands are clean. We had no part in it.

Olaf. That is all grist to Snorri's mill.

Thorgerd. In sooth

'Tis easily seen he sets the folk against us.

Olaf. For or against, their Faith is not for me.

Thorgerd. That cow we'll get no milk from.

Olaf. No, by Thor !

Times are much changed of late.

Thorgerd. Last night I dreamed

Kiartan came back ; and on his brow was grown

A golden cross, a marvel unto men,—

To him a burning flame. Then came a wench,

Comely to look upon, and with her lips

Gently, to ease him, kissed the cross away ;

And afterwards we saw him not, and some

Said he was child again in other lands,

And gladsome ; but the girl remained, and took

An anguish, and a burning on her lips,

And slowly died, fair spoken unto all,
 And very sweet and stately to the last :
 Then the ewes bleating in the garth awoke me :
 I thought, There's Kiartan laughing in his cradle.—
 Good bairn he was !

Olaf. You always dream of Kiartan.
 That comes of frets, and eating nought by day,
 To make it up o' nights.

Tborgerd. When Skuld, the Norn,
 Goes nightly on her errand past our porch,
 Carrying the Future upon a skein, she flings
 A shadow, and we dream of things to come.
 —My star ! who's standing in the doorway yonder ?
 How like the maid I dreamt of !

Olaf. Enter, child !

Hrefna enters.

Tborgerd. Who is it ? Clad so wildly,—all her hair
 Blown, and her bosom panting as with speed ?

Hrefna. The wedding feast—?

Tborgerd. Is over.

Hrefna. Over ?

Tborgerd. Aye !

Last night.

Olaf. By Thor ! 'Tis Hrefna !

Tborgerd. Mercy, child !

How came you here ! We heard you were at
Burgfirth.

Hrefna. Gudrun is wedded ! Oh, too late, too late !
They said the feast was held to-day.

Thorgerd. The monks
Bade fast to-day, and so 'twas held on Thursday.

Hrefna. Kiartan sailed into Burgfirth yesternight,
Not wedded to the Princess ! All the rest
Believed that tale ; not I :—for was not Kiartan
Fibre of faithfulness, and mighty in love,
Toward Gudrun ?

Olaf. Loki blinds us. So we drive
Headlong on hidden rocks, and Kiartan's life
Is shipwrecked.

Thorgerd. Child ! And have you ridden all night ?

Hrefna. Yes,—and too late !

Thorgerd. Alone ?

Hrefna. Ah, but poor Kiartan !

Thorgerd. Alone across the fells by night ! My star !
Met you no troll-wives ?

Hrefna. None. I lost my way.
But found the path again ; and afterwards
There were some hoofs behind me.

Thorgerd. It makes me shudder !

Olaf. That was a true Valkyria's ride, by Thor !
The woof that songs are wrought of.

Tborgerd. Thorolt's ghost
Walks much o' nights, and folk are beaten coal-black.
I wonder you escaped. Did you not fear ?

Hrefna. Not very much. I stumbled once, remounted,
And rode in pain. But when the moon swam out,—
I laughed and said, “ ‘Tis only I who am dying ;
Kiartan is being saved.”

Olaf. A Valkyr truly,
But of the living, not the dead.

Hrefna. —And now
Kiartan will not be saved. O would that I
Had perished ! [Cries hysterically]

Tborgerd. The child is overweary. Come !
Eat, drink, and sleep. All may be for the best.

Exeunt Tborgerd and Hrefna.

Olaf. Riders without ! What, ho !

Seizes his sword. Enter several thralls from
behind the arras ; then from the front
of the stage Kiartan and Kalf ; with
them two men bearing a large trunk.

Kiartan. Not foes, my father.

Olaf, recognising his son, drops his sword and
waves a dismissal to the thralls. During
the following the bearers of the box carry
it down the hall, through the arras ; then
retire the way they came.

Olaf. Kiartan, my bairn ! [They embrace] And Kalf !
Welcome, friend Kalf !

Kiartan. Not welcome I,—if what they tell be true,
That Gudrun weds to-day with Bolli.

Olaf. Son,
We hoped your thoughts had wandered far from her.

Kiartan. Shall Iceland be forgotten of Olaf's son !

Olaf. Not Iceland, Kiartan.

Kiartan. And is not Iceland Gudrun ?
The flowers are made of her, the sky, the sea,
The blue hills, and the blush upon the snow ;
The mown hay breathes of Gudrun, and the gulls
Call to the wild sea-nesses Gudrun's name.
No, I have not forgotten Gudrun, father ! . . .
But tell me, and quickly, since for aught I know
Next moment brings me face to face with Bolli,
Does she then love him, think you ?

Olaf. Love or not,
It little boots—

Kiartan. Nay, much ; for, if she do,
Not like a sword edge Kiartan cuts the knot,
But lays his blessing on it,— and good-bye
To Iceland ! But if Gudrun love him little,
Then, by the rood, I'll have her ; yea, in sooth,
Though all the sons of Kiallak from their cairns
Rise up against me ; for I take it ill

That Bolli would betray me.

Olaf. No, my son,
Bolli betrays you not ; we thought you wedded,
And to a Princess.

Kiartan. Bolli thought it not :
He knew my mind toward her.

Olaf. Others said—

Kiartan. Yes,—others : geese will gabble. The Princess
Was not for me.

Kalf. [To *Olaf*] True : but she might have been,
Had Kiartan willed it.

Kiartan. Bite thy tongue on that !
It is a baseness.

Kalf. Tut, man ! it is truth.

[To *Olaf*] He was the king's boon fellow ; and the
Princess

Was mad in love with him.

Olaf. Eh, eh, my son ?
Kiartan taps impatiently on the board,
making no reply.

Kalf. For all her blushing ways and maiden meekness,
She liked it little that Kiartan held to Gudrun.

Olaf. [To *Kiartan*] Now what say you to that ?

Kiartan. I say, by the rood,
That Princess was a saint ; and Kalf, so be it
He be not less than man, will hold his tongue.

Kalf. Would you have all folk say that you, not she,
'Gan harping to the love tune ?

Kiartan. Let them say it.

Kalf. And blame you falsely for a broken troth ?
Not I !

Olaf pours out wine.

Kiartan. Peace, Kalf ! And father, say : how goes it
'Twixt Bolli and Gudrun ?

Olaf. [Handing him wine] As betwixt folk wedded.

Kiartan. You mean, they love. *[He drinks]*

Olaf. I mean—the knot is tied,
That in the severing cuts the quick of kin.

Kiartan. Wedded ! *[He tosses the drinking horn down*
fiercely on the board] The feast was fixed for Friday.

Olaf. And held
On Thursday.

Kiartan. Christ !

Olaf. Some shaveling's scruple.

Kiartan. Lies !
Bolli had news I landed.

Enter Thborgerd.

Thborgerd. Oh, my bairn !

They embrace.

[To Olaf] He knows ?

Kiartan. I know.

Tborgerd.

Alas, that we should live
To deal this blow, and in the hour of greeting !

Kiartan. [Pacing the hall in agitation]

Ha, Bolli ! Well done, Bolli ! They who stab
Hearts bared to them in love should strike like you,
Slyly and swift for safety : afterwards
There's time to laugh into the open wound !
Now father, mother, comrade, hark to me !
Henceforth, if any man possess a friend,
Held more than brother, catch him by the ear !
Cry Caution ! Foul play is brewing. Bid him fasten
Padlocks upon his barn, grip tight his purse,
Set watch-dogs near his wife,—lest by his friend
He is robbed, betrayed, stripped naked of his joy,
Flung out like flotsam on a reef of woe,—
Fooled ! Juggled !

Olaf. By your leave, my son, I quit you.

Kiartan. To warn your Bolli,—have him safe in byre ;—

Peacemaker Olaf, that's your rede, I reckon.—
Nay, hold ! I will not kill him : men like him
Should live and prosper, that the world may know
He is the fool who trusts ; for traitors thrive,—
While true men tumble. . . .

Olaf. Vow you will not kill him.

Kiartan. The old gods perish, and Bolli slays the new :
There's nothing left to vow by.

Olaf. Aye, my son !

Our love !

Kiartan. [Huskily] Oh father !

Olaf. Bairn, I greatly doubt,
For all you say, if Bolli did betray you.

Kiartan. Prove he was true, then are you twice my father,
Making again the man that else were unmade.

Olaf. One, who left Norway after him, declared
He saw you wed in Nidoyce.

Kiartan. Never a ship
Left Thrandheim after Bolli's.

Olaf. The yokel ran
And overtook the ship.

Kiartan. That man had wings—
And silver taught his tongue.

Olaf. If it were Snorri's ?

Kiartan. Ah !

Olaf. True it was, the man was taken aboard
Nigh Thrandheim Mouth ; and if the ship were
windbound
Bolli might well believe him.

Kiartan. God in heaven !
Where is that snake ?

Olaf. Softly my son. Be sure ;
And then——

Kiartan. What then ?

Olaf.

Be wary.

Kiartan.

Here's cud for chewing.

If Bolli, like the rest, were Snorri's dupe—?

. . . Was Snorri at the feast?

Olaf.

He took the high-seat;

We being adverse to the outlandish rites:

For mickle change has marred us since you came,

And the old priest and the new ones rule the Dales;

"Father of the Faith" they call him.

Kiartan.

Sooth! And he

Hastened the wedding?

Olaf.

May be: I meddled not.

Kiartan. Who sent for me?

Olaf.

That I know nought about.

Kiartan. A skipper out of Hunafirth brought word

"The Faith is taken in Iceland; and a wench

Bids warn Lord Kiartan evil brews at home:

Let him for Gudrun's sake return with speed."

Olaf. 'Twere well, my son, had you not dallied there,

But come with Bolli.

Kiartan.

Captives are not choosers.

Save for that word, "The Faith is taken in Iceland,"

Belike I were not here to-day; for not

Till then the King released me.

Olaf.

Captives?

Kiartan. Say rather, hostage for the Faith.

Olaf. My son a hostage ?

That we knew nought of.

Kiartan. Not from Bolli ?

Olaf. Nought.

Kiartan. Then Gudrun knew not !

Olaf. No, or I'll be bound
She would have waited for you.

Kiartan. Ah Bolli, Bolli !

Thorgerd. [Rocking herself] Oh ! Oh !

Olaf. Time is a trusty leech, my son. Take cheer.

Kiartan. Bolli, my little brother : Thou and I
Clomb nesting on the cliffs, raced in the snow,
Trapped foxes, swam together,—thou and I,—
When we were lads ; and once Death came, and said,
“Good-morrow !” we being lost among the fells.

Thorgerd. Oh ! Oh !

Olaf. I mind me.

Kiartan. Huddled together we sat,
Nor ever thought to see our home again ;
The moon was sinking on a world of snow ;
Our hands were clasped ; I looked into his eyes,—
Clear as a frosty night,—and Truth and Love
Shone in their depths more brightly than the stars.
Death passed us by,—an evil thing to do.

Thorgerd. He carried Bolli on his back three leagues,
And saved his life that night.

Olaf. True, so he did !
Kiartan. "Oh, never the night shall come on us again,
 But I shall know those stars are there," I said.
Tborgerd. My bairn ! My bairn ! Can nothing comfort
 thee ?

Kiartan. Now it is night, and there are no more stars.

*Enter Kalf, through the arras ; which, being
 drawn, exposes Hrefna kneeling beside the box,
 and examining the contents.*

Kalf. Lo, here is my sister Hrefna ! She it was
 Who bribed the skipper over at Hunafirth
 To warn us out in Norway against the wedding.

Kiartan. Your Hrefna !

Kalf. Sooth ! And now she has come alone
 On horse from Burgfirth, riding all the night.
 She lost her way, yet wild to stop the wedding
 Outrode us. Where's the man could do it ?

Tborgerd. Or woman,—
 Unless she loved ?

Kiartan. Pray, who does Hrefna love ?

Tborgerd. You, Kiartan.

Kiartan. No, by the rood : she would keep quiet,
 Wheedle and cozen and traitorously lie,
 Scrabble for happiness herself, and to hell
 With the rival ! 'Tis the way of love.

Tborgerd. Not Hrefna's.

Olaf. The night is dark, my son ; yet stars are shining.

Kalf. [Calling to Hrefna, who, unaware that the arras is drawn, stands at a mirror and tries on a coif richly woven with gold, which she has taken out of the box]

Hands off ! That's not for you, nor me : 'tis Kiartan's.

Thborgerd. All gold ! My star ! Was ever a coif so fine !

Kalf. The Princess gave it for his bride to wear.

Hrefna. [Looking round shyly and embarrassed, as she removes it from her head and is about to replace it in the box]

For Gudrun ? . . . Oh !

Kiartan. [Loudly] Who says it is not Hrefna's ?

Right comely does it sit upon her brow,

Like constancy and courage in her soul.

She trusted, she forsook me not,—and she

Shall have it, an she will.

Olaf. Son, you say wisely.

Kiartan. [Aside to Thborgerd]

A sweet soul to make happy : here's a thing

To live for.

Hrefna. I am not worthy. . . No, I cannot !

Kiartan. [Drawing near to Hrefna]

I'll never see it deck another head :

It fitted yours too well. Where is the fire ?

Exit, through the arras toward the fire ball.

Thborgerd. Go, stop him, child : he'll burn it.

Hrefna follows him.

Olaf, see !

Did I not say 'twould all be for the best ?
She's worth a brace of Gudruns.

Olaf. That's the truth !
But what will Asgeir say ?

Kalf. Small doubt of that.

Olaf. Your hand, my lad,—and proud I am to take it.

Enter Bolli from the door bebind Kalf.

Bolli. Good morrow, foster father.

Olaf. Hail, my son.
And how slept Gudrun ?

Bolli. Well.

Kalf. [Turning to face him] Bolli, I greet thee.

Bolli. Kalf ! [Stands amazed]

Kalf. I was thinking, when a bolt from heaven
Comes crashing through the rafters, such a guest
Looks not for civil greeting.

Bolli. [Recovering] Kalf, I trow,
Is always welcome.

Kalf. Thy hand upon it, fellow.
They shake hands.

Kiartan will joy to see you.

Bolli. I fear him not.

Kalf. Ah !

Olaf, who has gone burriedly to intercept
Kiartan, meets him at the arras.

Olaf. Son, your vow ! Remember !

Kiartan pushes past Olaf, leaps over the benches, and, rushing up to Bolli, seizes him fiercely by the shoulders.

Kiartan. Ah, friend Bolli,

I greet a married man. You timed it well.

Bolli. Kiartan, I timed it not.

Kiartan. Hast a new tongue ?

The one I knew was not so glib on lies.

Bolli. Had this one lied, then would I shear it off.

Kiartan. Out with it, man ! My sword is at your service :

Good steel : the gift of Tryggvason the King.

Bolli. Not for my tongue ; there is no guilt in that.

Kiartan. Now on my word, he shows a brazen front !

Look in my face and utter that lie again.

Bolli. I speak the truth : the shavelings fixed the feast,

Not I.

Kiartan. Then, by the rood, and by this arm,

Not once nor twice the ransom of your life,

Swear that you said not I was wed in Norway.

Bolli. I swear it.

Kiartan. Swear you did not bribe that dog

Who vowed he saw the wedding.

Bolli. That I swear.

Kiartan. Swear that you spoke to make my honour clear.

Bolli. [Pointing to Olaf and Thorgerd] These are my
witnesses.

Kiartan. Now swear that these
Knew from your lips the cause that kept me.

Bolli. That
I say not.

Kiartan. Aha !

Bolli. Ask Gizur as to that.
The King bade hide that you were hostage.

Kiartan. You
Consenting ?

Bolli. Else they had sworn you loved the Princess.
To spare your Gudrun that I held my peace.

Kiartan. My Gudrun !

Bolli. Then they witnessed you were wedded.
Olaf. Bolli tells truth—he ever stood your champion.

A pause. *Kiartan leans on his sword and reflects.*

Then, suddenly and spontaneously,

Kiartan. Fellow, your hand ! I wronged you. Others
plotted,—

Snorri, belike,—not you. Your brow is clear :
Happier it might be, on your wedding morrow.
Now grieve not ; drink the sun from Gudrun's heart :
I will not cast a shadow on your joy.
Let us not meet too oft ; else, man, I warn you
Iceland might grow too small for me and Gudrun.—
Our lives are knit in tangle of the Norns ;
But there is strength in me to cut the knot.

So, good-bye, lad : think kindly of old Kiartan :
We have been glad together, you and I.
Now you'll have mirth with Gudrun. As for me,—
Oh, we'll do well enough, my lad : good-bye !

Bolli. Hold ! you were keen to question. Think again :
Have you no doubts ? It is not well to part
With doubts unspoken.

Kiartan. None. You have not blenched.
I brush the blur away, and see your soul
As through a glass, untarnished. Here's my hand :
I doubt you not.

Bolli. [Drawing back] Then, listen all ! I lied !
Foully I lied ! My tongue kept troth alone.
Then, of this carcass soaked in lies preserve
Nought but the scrupulous tongue ; for all the rest
Is vileness. Slay me ! Cast to the winds my ashes,
Lest they should plague and poison all the land.

Olaf. Man, you are mad ! Believe him not, my son.

Bolli. Sane as a skald ! To lies that damned my friend
I gave the nod ; and now they come to roost :
Breed, swarm about my life ; taste in my food ;
Mock me from Gudrun's eyes ; and like a ghost
Hover betwixt us ! Myriad little lies,
All silent, silent, even as I was silent,
Swarm, and they suck like vampires. Gudrun's lips
Wax pale, her eyes lose fire, that harp her voice

Is jangled,—half the sweet strings broken—

Olaf.

Mad !

His moods of late have shown it.

Bolli.

Am I mad ?

Hear then ! That liar swore he saw you wedded
After our ship left Nidoyce. That same ship
Carried two liars, slayers of souls ; and one
Lied, as the sword slays, boldly ; but the other—
Still as the plague !

Kiartan.

I know. One ran on foot,
Joining the ship at Thrandheim Mouth, but you
Tarried in the fiord becalmed.

Bolli.

We tarried not,
But ran before the breeze like souls that sin.

Kiartan. You knew he lied ?

Bolli. I knew it. Snorri bribed him.
All men believed ; Gudrun believed ; and I
Was silent. Now destroy me.

Kiartan.

Ah Bolli, Bolli !

You did not well. Gudrun is good to have,
Yet if she knew this, think you she would love you ?

Bolli. Out with your sword !

Kiartan. Hate, they say, in a wife
Brings hell about your life.

Bolli.

More cause to kill me.

Kiartan. I loved you, Bolli. Think : a friend that loves

Is better than a wife that hates you.

Ha, you fool ! [Seizes him fiercely by the throat]
Could you not think of that ?

Olaf. [In alarm] My son, your vow !

Kiartan. [Loosening his hold and speaking boarsely, but with
calmness] Fear not, my father : Bolli is a man :

There's that within my heart that likes him still.

Bolli. Out with your sword, I say !

↪ Kiartan. You wish to see it ?

Look then ! The blade is true : none such in Iceland.
In many a fight it should have saved my friend ;
May yet : who knows ? For, see : a cross is here,—
Carven upon the hilt. Besides, you still
Are Bolli, and your wife is Gudrun. Brother,
We both love Gudrun. There's a thing to do. . . .
No matter. Come to a feast I'll bid this se'nnight :
And when I speak, hold silence. Go in peace.

ACT IV.

SCENE.—*Herd bolt, the Guest Hall, as in Act III. Kiartan is surveying the hall in preparation for guests.*

Enter Hrefna.

Kiartan. Hail, Hrefna ! Lo, our wedding feast is spread !
Sit there [*pointing to the big seat on the principal bench*], and let me look upon my bride.—
The kirtle fits you well.

Hrefna. That seat is Gudrun's.

Kiartan. Now it is yours and Gudrun sits below.

Hrefna. Is she not held chief lady of the Dales,—
Being of the house of Kiallak ?

Kiartan. That I wot not :

At wedding feasts the bride is honoured most . . .

Now don this golden coif.

Hrefna. [*Trying it on*] So ?

Kiartan. That is brave !

Hrefna. I will not wear it, lest Gudrun think I mock her.

Kiartan. You mock her not.

Hrefna. Dear, but the grandeur irks me.

Could I but kneel, and look up in your eyes,
And worship—

Kiartan. Nay, but have a care, my bride :
When women make us gods, like Thor we tumble,
And out of us crawl vermin.

Hrefna. Kiartan, dear,
You'll think of Gudrun ?

Kiartan. Belike, I'll not forget her.

Hrefna. Nor bid me wear the coif, and take the high seat ?

Kiartan. Aye, by the rood, you shall.

Hrefna. The coif was hers.
I have no right to gifts you won for Gudrun.

Kiartan. I won this for my bride. Maugre their lies,
You trusted me, but Gudrun would not trust,
Nor wait : she judged me out of court.

Hrefna. Three years
She waited.

Kiartan. 'Sooth, I blame her not. Natheless,
I will not shame my bride to please a Kiallak.
That seat is yours.

Hrefna. Would Kiartan be unkind ?

Kiartan. To Kiartan, not to Gudrun. Here's a fight
Fiercer than swords and bow-hail ; and I wage it
For her not less than you.

Hrefna. I'd liefer sit
Lowest among the thralls than wear that coif

To anger Gudrun.

Kiartan. Listen, Hrefna, then :
 Since I returned—to you alone I say it—
 Thrice have the eyes of Bolli's wife met mine,
 And thrice they beckoned me. Now, look you, child :
 What would you have me do ? Play double game ?
 Keep two lamps burning,—Bolli's hearth being dark ?

Hrefna. Not that !

Kiartan. Quit Hrefna, then ?

Hrefna. Ah, never !

Kiartan. No.
 Then let us end it. It is better so :
 For all the world has changed to me of late.
 The outward good seems vain, the inward draws me :
 Aye, through your eyes it draws me,—through your
 eyes !

Hrefna, we'll end it.

Hrefna. Gudrun's eyes are fairest.

Kiartan. Sooth, she is like a goddess ; but methinks [*kiss-*
ing her forehead]

Here where I touch you—here be better things !

Hrefna. Can little Hrefna be so much to Kiartan ?

Kiartan. A cross of flame burnt lately on my brow :
 You kissed that cross away.

Hrefna. Oh, I could weep,—
 Could weep for joy to hear you say that word.

Kiartan. So happy, child ? But what of those at Laugar ?
Mark me, a reptile coils among these dales,
Sleeping, and in the hollow of his rings
Two birds have built their nest : the one is Bolli,
My friend, the other Gudrun whom I love.
You'll bear to hear me say I love her still ?

Hrefna. Dear, you shall always . . . Is that reptile Snorri ?

Kiartan. 'Tis Bolli's lie. Coming, I trod upon it,
And stirred its fangs. But I can slay that reptile :
I only ; and, so help me God, I will :
Though Gudrun's love die with it. She must hate
Bolli or me : she shall hate me, not Bolli.

Hrefna. I cannot help but worship.

Kiartan. Let that be.

But stand you by me. When my speech is made
There will be those who'll say rough words of Kiartan.
You'll know me, Hrefna, though all the world misknows.

Hrefna. Is there no other way ? 'Twill hurt you so
To think that Gudrun hates you.

Kiartan. Wear the coif ;
Take you the high seat. We will kill her fondness,—
For her sake and for Bolli's.

Hrefna. Kiartan, think !
That soft bright love in Gudrun's heart you know,
But there's a thing beside, not soft, not bright :
The love will die, but *that* will leap to life.

Kiartan, I saw it once ! Brave not that terror,—
I implore you, brave it not.

Kiartan. You judge her ill.
Is gentle Hrefna jealous ?

Hrefna. Have I shown it ?

Kiartan. Tears ?

Hrefna. Oh, you close my mouth !

Kiartan. Aye, with a kiss.
Howbeit for all your pretty pleadings, child,
I'll have my way.

Hrefna. Kiartan is wont to have it.
Still—still I fear !

Kiartan. Fear nought. This course seems good,
Like song and sunset : why we know not, but methinks,
As by desire's and tastes the senses speak,
So does the soul declare itself alive
By pity of friends and love of noble deeds :
And as with poisonous food, though sweet and fair,
The nostrils nauseate, so conscience warns
The soul of that which slays it ; and if I
Knowing what woe, what wrack to those I love
Hangs on that issue, speak no word to save them,
My soul drinks poison,—it shrinks,—its life shall
wane.

Evil may come ; but less I count the risk
To this the dubious life of flesh and sense

Than to the firm and actual element,
The life which loves the good and scorns the base.
Hrefna, to none save Bolli have I thus
Laid bare my soul. It needs that you go with me.
To you my debt is greatest. Will you, Hrefna ?

Hrefna is speechless : she takes his hand and lifts it to her lips.

Your eyes assure me. . . When your brother comes
Bid him say nought, however my speech amaze him.
Here is my father.

Enter Olaf.

Father, 'tis my wish
That Hrefna takes the high seat,—Gudrun that
On the lower bench.

Olaf. I doubt, my son. . . Well, well !
Even as you will. I'll take my place beside her.

Kiartan. That I had thought of. Thanks, my father,
thanks !

And when I speak, though what I say perplex you,
Gainsay me not. Belike the folk that love me
Will pry beneath my prating : that's no matter. . . .
Here come the priests.

Enter the monks Gizur and Hialti. They move about sprinkling the hall with holy water.

Olaf. They call that holy water ;

I call it dews of foul hypocrisy.
 Howbeit salt water harms not fish nor fellow,
 So let them sprinkle.

*The guests troop in : among them Snorri and
 Thorod Scatcatcher, Kalf Asgeirson, Bolli,
 Gudrun, Oswif, Thordis, and their sons.
 Hrefna goes aside and speaks with Kalf.*

Snorri. Olaf, by your leave,—

You like our Faith no better ? Shall I lead ?

Olaf. Aye ; for we wash our hands o't. Never a feast
 Until yon shavelings rid us of their rede
 Will Olaf oversee. So sit ye there :
 Goodwife, we watch their foolings from below.

Snorri. [Loudly, as master of ceremonies]

Way for the Queen o' the Dales, great Oswif's
 daughter !

To left of her will sit the son of Olaf,
 His bride beside him. On the other side,
 Lord Bolli.

Kiartan. Hold ! My bride shall take that seat.

No hurt to Oswif's kin :—this day at least
 My bride shall queen it in her new abode.

Olaf. Honour us, Gudrun, sitting on my right,
 Here on our lower bench.

Snorri. I bow to Kiartan :
 He is the hero. . . . What said Oswif the wise ?

Tbordis. Oswif said "Humph."

Uspak. By Thor, he well may say it,

Seeing us sons of Kiallak lick the dust

Before these upstarts of an underling,

These brats of Koll-a-dales. I'll quit the hall

Sooner than take this shaming.

Gudrun. Peace, my brother !

It is but right that he who makes this feast

Should order all things as his heart ordains.

Uspak mutters.—*Gudrun takes her place with Olaf*

and the kindred of Oswif at the lower bench.

Hrefna takes the high seat.

Kiartan. As did my sires before me unto their brides,

Hrefna, I crown you with this golden coif

Giv'n me for mine by Ingibiorg, the Princess.

The priests mumble a Latin grace.

Snorri. Drink to the health of Kiartan and his bride :

No breaker of vows this mighty son of Olaf :

Mutterings at the lower bench.

Kindred, why murmur ? I know not what ye mean.

One vow at least is kept : who asks for more ?

Times change and brides are taken : he would win

A queenly gift to deck his wife ; and lo,

Next time we meet she dons it !

The murmurs are renewed.

Iceland holds

No cloth like that—eight ounces, I'll be sworn,
 All beaten gold ! Well may the bride be proud !
 Touching the winning, note withal he said
 No syllable as to how or whence or where.
 Conquests there be of bower or battlefield——

Hoarse laughter from the lower benches.

—Enough that he has won it ! Drink his health ;
They drink.

And may he live to win a hundred gifts
 Likewise—[*the laughter is renewed*]—And she whom
 all men praise, fair Hrefna,
 Be wearer of them all—[*the laughter grows uproarious*]
 —Nay, nay, by Thor,
 I know not why ye laugh. Hail, Iceland's Sigurd !
 Thor send you luck. [*They drink again*] I fear these
 folk be rude.

Kiartan. Nay, priest, I thank thee : weddings should be
 merry.

I had a speech to make, but let that be.
 Their laughter blew like winter through my brain,
 And all the words flew out. This only stays :
 Someone spat venom on a noble name—
 A princess's. Out upon him ! It is false !
 Her bower is sacred as the holy virgin's.

He pauses, and then speaks with care and emphasis.
 If I have wooed, it was in manly wise,

The King of Norwayavouring ; but ye say,—
 “ Ill sped my suit ” ; and that I’ll not deny ;
More lightly.

And since the dearest maiden is my bride,
 Right glad I am !

Voices from the Higher Bench. Well spoken, Kiartan.

Olaf. Ah !

A Voice. There’s sour blood sweetened.

Kiartan. Sour blood, no, in sooth :

Nought at this feast take sourly : all is mirth.

No friend of mine is he who takes it ill.

I drink to Snorri.

He draws out his sword and shows it to Snorri.

Behold, good priest, our sword.

“ King’s gift,” we call it : gear no woman toys with ;
 In two score fights we won it from the King.

There is a cross upon the hilt. [He points to it and
lowers his voice for Snorri’s ear alone] That saves
 you,—

That only : else, by Thor, the blade had drunk
 Your wassail deep in redder wine than ours.

[Aloud] Pass round the sword, for all good folk to see.

As it is handed round and admired,

Liot. [Sings]

What God stands white in the guest hall,
 In raiment woven of sun-rays ?

What rushing of wings or of waters ?
 What new boon born unto men ?
 Fill full your horns with the foam cup ;
 Gild well your goblets with god-ale :
 Your wine is changed to a wonder,
 Your water is wrought into wine.

Hialti. [To a guest] What strange old man is chanting ?
The Guest. Liot the blind :

Folk say his darkness glows with shapes unseen ;
 Real things are shadows and our shadows real.

Hialti. There was a wedding feast in Cana-stead,
 Near Micklegarth, where God's feet first trod earth.
 Not of this feast, but that, the old man sings.

Liot. [Sings]

O King of the league of boon fellows,
 O Killer of vengeance with kindness,
 The truster has sat with the traitor,
 And anger is not in the cup !—
 Fill full your horns unto brimming ;
 Let gush your goblets with god-ale !
 Thou pourest the wine of our wassail,
 Thy board is the breadth of the world.

Another Guest. What folk can see in that old skald I wot
 not :

No more than other carles he kens the seasons,
 Nor wards the evil eye, nor lays the ghosts.

Liot. [Sings]

Now Sigurd drank and his strength grew :
He shunned not the valley of shaming,
Where the World-worm, mark of his weapon,
Lay coiled on the hearth of his kin.
Fill full your horns with the foam-cup,
And clank your goblets and drain them :
When the World-worm falls to his weapon
The dusk of the gods will be past.

First Guest. His song goes wandering in and out old legends.

Second Guest. What's this of Sigurd's kin ? That's not i' the tale.

Third Guest. There go the shavelings : [*Following with his eyes Hialti, who has risen and joined Gizur*].
Now begins their mumming.

Those of the new faith go aside, and feast
On bread and wine that folk say works a marvel :
A god's veins were the vineyard.

Kiartan and Hrefna rise ; others follow.
Come and see them :

This way into the fire hall. Olaf stays :
Scorning the Faith.

First Guest. He also rises. Look !

Second Guest. He has crossed to speak with Kiartan.
Listen, now.

Olaf. Son, we will take the Faith.

Kiartan. [With enthusiasm] Ho, priests,—hurrah !

Bring ye the font : my father takes the Faith.

Olaf. From your hands, Kiartan, not from theirs.

*The guests file out into the fire hall. Holy water
is handed to Kiartan, who marks Olaf and
Thorgerd with the sign of the cross, they
kneeling before him in silence.*

Hialti. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus sancti. Amen.

*Exeunt all but Uspak and Helgi. The lights
burn low.*

Helgi. What now ?

Uspak. What now ?

Helgi. Are we the sons of Kiallak ?

Uspak. When Kiartan is a scabbard for our blades.

Helgi. When Herdholt reeks in smoke as high as Snowfell.

Chant swells up from the fire hall.

Quia per incarnati verbi mysterium, nova mentis
nostræ oculis lux tuæ claritatis infulsit : ut dum
visibiliter Deum cognoscimus, per hunc in invisibilium
amorem rapiamur—*

Uspak. Hrefna shall pay full dearly for her coif.

Helgi. Belike a widow's weeds will suit her better.

* Because, by the mystery of the incarnate Word, a new light of Thy glory hath shone upon the eyes of our mind : that while visibly we know God, by Him we may be drawn to the love of things invisible.

Uspak. The seat we sat on smelt of thralls and franklins.
Helgi. Soon it shall smell of fire.

Uspak. Let fire alone.
It burns the fingers.

Helgi. Every dog we spare
Will live to bite us.

Uspak. The old dog dotes on peace.

Helgi. He dotes on Kiartan more.

Uspak. On Bolli next.
If either cub were dead he'd lick the other.
By Thor, we'll make a scabbard out of Kiartan,
A shield of Bolli.

Helgi. How ?

Uspak. His back is broad.
There's striking room behind, and if his kin
Strike back, the bane is Bolli's.

Helgi. Sooth ; but he
Couples with Kiartan.

Uspak. Nought like the pull of wedlock
To snap old cables.

Helgi. Gudrun spoke against us.

Uspak. Deem not that cats lack claws because they cushion.
How go their cooings think you ?

Helgi. Gudrun's ?

Uspak. Aye :
The girl talks little of late.

- Helgi.* They go but sourly.
Uspak. She broods on something.
Helgi. 'Tis not love I deem.
Uspak. Go, search the arras.
Helgi rises and peers behind the curtains.
Chant. [Heard from the fire hall]
 Hanc igitur oblationem servitutis nostræ, sed et cunctæ
 familiæ tuaæ, quæsumus Domine, ut placatus accipias :
 diesque nostros in tua pace disponas—*
- Uspak.* No one watches ?
Helgi. None.
Uspak. Hand me that sword.
Helgi brings him Kiartan's sword "King's Gift,"
 which has been left on the benches.
Uspak. Now Kalf's.
Helgi brings him a sword which bangs among others
 upon the wainscotting. He takes them both
 out of the sheath, lays Kalf's on the bench, and
 examines Kiartan's.
 Good steel, by Thor !
 Against it all our Iceland blades are grass.
 Springs over the bench, waves Kiartan's sword in
 the air, and seizes the swearing stone.

* Therefore, O Lord, we beseech Thee that graciously Thou wilt accept this offering of the service of us and of Thy whole family, and dispose our days in Thy peace.

Now by the hammer of Thor I, Uspak, swear
 Kiartan's own sword shall drink of Kiartan's blood.

He places Kiartan's sword in Kalf's scabbard, and conceals it in the folds of his cloak. Next he puts Kalf's sword in Kiartan's scabbard and bands it back to Helgi, who replaces it on the bench where it was found. Meanwhile chanting wells again from the fire hall.

Chant. Hic est enim Calyx Sanguinis mei, novi et æterni testamenti ; mysterium fidei ; qui pro vobis et pro multis effundetur in remissionem peccatorum.*

Helgi. How compass that ?

Uspak. Know you a lonely barn
 High on the rocky path by Ottar's Wood ?
 The gorge beneath it cleaves the fells in twain,
 And hides a boiling torrent.

Helgi. Well I know it.

Uspak. That way will Kiartan pass, belike alone,
 To-morrow. In the barn is hiding room,
 And from the hill across the gorge a thrall
 Shall signal his approach, and warn us lest
 He goes attended : then the dog shall pass ;
 If not, we'll have his soul, the gorge his carcass ;

* For this is the cup of My blood, of the new and everlasting testament, the mystery of faith, which shall be shed for you and for many, unto the remission of sins.

And folk shall say he fell, and so was lost.
 Or if blood cries, then Bolli shields us . . Ha !
 Here comes the sister. Hide !

They draw the arras ; Liot is seen behind it.

They bide. Enter Gudrun and Bolli.

Gudrun. Sit, Bolli, and drink my health. The other folk
 Are still at Mass.

They seat themselves. Bolli drinks.

A clever minx that Hrefna.

Bolli. A maid of mickle daring, says her brother.

Gudrun. Three years ago, when those two snatched your
 Kiartan,

She dared to mock me with a draggled wreath,
 All weeds and yellow marigolds——

Bolli. I mind me.

Gudrun. Here, on my brow, she placed them. Now she
 tosses

That little head of hers, all pink and white,
 Proud as a princess, crowned with gold—my gold.

Bolli. Who ever saw the like !

Gudrun. Those eyes of hers
 Are deep, like witches' : they can pierce the future.
 When on this brow her dead weeds drooped, she saw,
 Far down the future, shining like the sun,
 My gold on hers.

Bolli. Strange fancies those !

Gudrun.

Ah Bolli !

Hrefna will e'en go laughing to her bed to-night,
While I go shamed and mocked at,—all my flowers
Drooping in dreams of all men.

Bolli.

Nay, in sooth :

Your flowers are fresh as morning.

Gudrun.

Once they were :

I was the proudest maid in Iceland once :
I, and no other, have sat where Hrefna sat :
I, the sole daughter of the house of Kiallak.—
To-day I sat with bonders.

Bolli.

True, by Thor !

Better to kill a man than shame his wife !

Gudrun. Bolli, you did right well to make believe
Your Kiartan had not wooed the Princess. That
Was friendly in you, Bolli. But you see
It was all false.

Bolli.

He did not wed her, though.

Gudrun. He sought the match : no less the wrong to me.

Bolli. That's true.

Gudrun. As lightly as he quitted me

When Hrefna schemed, so lightly did he woo
The Princess ; aye, and so lightly now once more,
His vows being broken and my love despised,
He shames me before all men.

Bolli.

Yea, in sooth,

I take it ill of Kiartan.

Gudrun. Not so lightly

He'd rue it,—if my husband were a man.

Bolli. [Bitterly] Your husband ! By what token am I
your husband ?

Gudrun. Your lack of love. No man, no husband loves.

Oh shame ! They would take all and give back
nothing.

Not so we win the least thing ; yet methinks
Love is of all the greatest.

Bolli. I would give
All—even life itself.

Gudrun. You would not give
A finger—or a friend.

Bolli. Then try me.

Gudrun. I will.

Drink, and be happy : you may win me yet.

*The guests troop in from the fire ball ; Gudrun
and Bolli mingle with them ; Uspak and Helgi
come out from behind the arras and speak
aside.*

Helgi. What think ye ? Will the bull go to the barn ?

Uspak. The bull goes where the heifer leads. To-night
We'll speak with her. . . . See ! Kiartan takes the
sword :

Buckles it on his side. . . . Ha ! ha ! Come, fly !

*Exeunt, unobserved by the throng : Thorod Scat-
catcher taps Snorri on the shoulder : he turns.*

Thorod. Whoop, master ! All goes well : what think ye ?
Snorri. Aye.

Thorod. The old fool takes the Faith. Much good he'll get !
Snorri. That cow is milked.

Thorod. How liked ye Uspak's looks ?

Snorri. As well as thunder when my enemy's hay
Rots on the ground, and the last load of mine
Is tossed and on the stack.

Goes to the dais and lifts his drinking horn.

Drink to great Olaf !

Long life to him, his son, his wife and nephews,
And fellowship and peace to all the Dales.

They drink with great uproar.

Snorri. Now will we join these twain and seal their bliss.

ACT V.

SCENE.—*The interior of a great barn. Darkness, except for a bright light entering through a hole or small window high in the wall to rear of the stage, and a streak through the crevice of the great folding doors which occupy almost the entire rear. A small side door to left. A ledge or large shelf to right beneath the hole.*

Enter from the small door first Gudrun, with an Old Man, then Bolli.

Gudrun. This way, dear Bolli.

Bolli. Here be rats, not cattle.

Gudrun. The barn is cool and clean ; there's straw to rest on.

She reclines on the straw. The Old Man retires to another corner.

Bolli. Thor ! But how dark !

Gudrun. Come closer to me, Bolli.

Yes : it was bright out there in Ottar's Glen.

Bolli. What made you pause just now, and stand, and gaze ?

Strange thoughts belike.

Gudrun. O nothing : why do you ask ?

Bolli. That streak of light, spraying your hair and cheeks,
Surprised a wondrous look,—so fierce, so eager.

Gudrun. Dear, 'twas the dawn of love. Mind you the day
When folk came home from Norway ?

Bolli. Well I mind it.

Gudrun. Then fell such gloom upon me ; but a ray
Lights me at last.

Bolli. [Eagerly] You love me ?

Gudrun. I think I do—

Bolli. [Sullenly] I doubt you'll ne'er do that : I've hoped
too long.

Gudrun. Dear, sit beside me, clasping, so, my waist.

Bolli. How your heart flutters ! Gudrun ! Is it true ?

Gudrun. Nay, what ?

Bolli. You love me ?

Gudrun. What beside——

Bolli. You start,—
Listening.

Gudrun. Yes,—hark ! What noise—?

Bolli. Beneath the chasm
A river in the entrails of the earth
Rumbles and churns and makes a mighty sound.

Gudrun. Not that. It seemed like galloping horses.

Bolli. Ah !
The torrent in the woods.

Gudrun. Yes, yes : how foolish ! . . .

Is it not dear to sit like this ? Now kiss me.

Bolli. Gudrun !

Gudrun. Not quite so fiercely, love : it hurts.

Bolli. Forgive ! I'll be so tender.

Gudrun. Bolli, listen :

On false pretence I brought you here to-day.

All must be secret : sooner I could not speak.

There is a ban upon our loves.

Bolli. A ban ?

Gudrun. Yes : it concerns the honour of our kindred.

A treasure is hid, and he alone who finds it

Can be in truth my husband.

Bolli. Where ? In this barn ?

Gudrun. Close by.

Bolli. Had I but known, I had brought a spade.

Gudrun. The weapon will be found.

Bolli. The weapon ?

Gudrun. Yes.

Spades would be useless : there's a beam to fell,—

A mighty beam ! Ah, Bolli, you are strong ;

These limbs are great,—full twice my brothers'.

Bolli. Come,

Give me the axe.

Gudrun. They'll bring it soon. It is
The blade of him who flung our treasure low,—

Who sunk it in the mire,—who took away
The honour of the Kiallaks and your bride.
That blade you wield to win me. Here they come.

Enter Uspak, Helgi, and their brother Jorrad.

*Uspak silently bands Gudrun a sword ; then
leaps on to the ledge and peers through the
window. Helgi and Jorrad wait beneath.*

Bolli. Gudrun, what means all this ?

Gudrun. Speak not, dear Bolli.

Helgi. [To Uspak] No signal yet ?

Uspak. Nay, hold ! The thrall stands up ;
Large on the sky-line of the hill I see him,
Shading his eyes against the sun to watch.

Helgi. Belike he comes more speedily than we thought.

Uspak. [Suddenly and fiercely,—leaping down from the ledge]
The gods are with us ! Kiartan is alone !

Now can we safely leave the barn and face him.

Up with you, folk ! He marches to his doom !

Come, Bolli !

Gudrun. Take this sword ; avenge your wife ;
Strike down the beam that stands athwart our honour :
Then have you won me body and soul. But turn,
Flinch, falter, parley, bring me back my shame,—
Then am I lost to you for ever. Go !

*He takes the sword, as if bewildered, and follows
the brothers. They push at the small door,*

opening it with effort, and carefully closing it behind them ; then exeunt.

Gudrun. [To the Old Man] Thrall, climb that shelf.

Old Man. What, I ?

Gudrun. Make speed. I'll help you.

Old Man. An ill bed for an aged carle.

Gudrun. Come, now !

Old Man. Has not fair Gudrun eyes to look herself ?

Gudrun. There's that to see that I can bear to hear,
Not look on. Climb the shelf.

He scrambles up, and peers out.
What see you ?

Old Man. A path

Betwixt two woods, a gorge,—a hill beyond it,—
The merry sunlight over all.

Gudrun. The path
Is empty ?

Old Man. Like this hand.

Gudrun. Tell all you see,
And it shall soon be filled.

Old Man. The birch-wood stirs :
There is an angry tempest in it : yet the sun
Shines, and the air is calm.

Gudrun. Still nothing ?—Watch !

Old Man. Foxes are in the bramble.

Gudrun. Look again.

Old Man. The dead leaves of the dead years lie and rustle.

Gudrun. No sound beside ? Go closer to the window.

Old Man. Thor thunders at his anvil in the glen. . . .

Some say it is the river. . . . Aha !

Gudrun. What now ?

Old Man. Out of the wood a great man comes a-striding,
Noble of aspect. . . . Now he stands . . . and
stares. . . .

Sees something in the wood. . . . His blade is
drawn,—

His back against the rock,—his shield uplifted.

Gudrun. Who spoke ?

Old Man. The great man : “Three to one,” he said.

Gudrun. Not four ?

Old Man. They leap at him ; he parries ; one
Has fallen.

Gudrun. Who ?

Old Man. Lord Jorrad.

Gudrun. Where is Bolli ?

Old Man [Pointing as if to count]

Lord Uspak—Helgi—Jorrad : Bolli I see not.

Gudrun. Craven ! He sells his kin !

Old Man. Frey ! There he stands.
Close to the cliff.

Gudrun. [To herself] That soul’s a hunted hare :

What if it leap the gorge ? Then may it go

But ill with the house of Oswif. [*To the Old Man*]
 Goodman, look !

Whither is my husband facing ? Toward the barn,
 Or down toward the chasm ?

Old Man. Toward the barn :
 His head is bent ; he leans upon his sword.

Gudrun. Sulking : that's Bolli.

Old Man. Frey help us ! How they hack,
 And bleed,—such lusty men : a woful sight !
 Uspak is down,—now Helgi.

Gudrun. We are lost !

[*To the Old Man*] Fool ! Do you hide your head ?

Old Man. I fear ! I fear !

Gudrun. Watch, and tell all, or you shall die. . . . What
 now ?

Old Man. The great man's sword is bent : he wipes his
 brow,

And straightens it on his knee.

Gudrun. That sword may save us.

Is any killed ?

Old Man. One drags a wretched body
 All drenched with blood, for shelter by the barn.

Gudrun. Who ?

Old Man. Uspak. Helgi rises—Jorrad—down !

Gudrun. What of my husband ?

Old Man. Still as any tree.

Gudrun. Thor send he root and grow there ! Traitor !

Old Man. Ah !

DEEP VOICE. [From without] Come Bolli ! For or against
me ! Strike !

Gudrun. His voice !

Oh ! Can I bear to hear it ?

Old Man. All are down.

Lord Bolli has moved ; his sword is drawn ; they
face :

Two giants in the sunlight.

Gudrun. Have they spoken ?

Old Man. No word. The birds are singing.

DEEP VOICE. [From without] Thou or me !
One or the other must die.

Gudrun runs to the side door ; she pulls franti-
cally ; it cleaves to the lintel.

Old Man. [Mechanically echoing the words] Or the other
must die.

DEEP VOICE. [From without]

Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain,
Than bid you die by mine.

Old Man. [Mechanically] Brother, by your
Hand liefer I were slain, than bid you die
By mine.

Gudrun. [Screaming] Ah, spare him, Bolli !

She pushes violently at the great doors ; runs again

*to the small door ; shakes it madly ; returns to
the great doors : neither will yield.*

ANOTHER VOICE. [As if from below] Strike, for Gudrun !
Who wins will have her.

Old Man. Ah !

Gudrun. [With horror] What hissed ? . . It came
Out of the earth,—down there ? [Pointing down to her
feet] Oh ! From within me ! [She shudders.]
It spoke as from within me !

Old Man. Belike Lord Uspak—
He crouches by the barn.

Gudrun. Shout, fellow ! Shout :
“Gudrun bids Bolli spare him.”

Old Man. [Shouting] Gudrun bids . . .
He flings up his arms.
Too late ! He dropped his sword—his shield—and
then

Lord Bolli smote. Clean through him went the blade !

*Gudrun thrusts at the great doors frantically. They
both yield, exposing the whole of the back of
the stage, and the view described by the old
man. In the dazzling light Kiartan is seen
lying dead, his head on Bolli's knee.*

Bolli. [Hoarsely] O Kiartan, live ! I knew not what I did.
They drove me mad ! Have pity on me, Kiartan !
Live !

Uspak. [Rising and staggering towards Kiartan]

Hark ! Voices among the wood ! Now,
quick !

Over the cliff he goes.

Bolli. Who touches him

Shall die.

Uspak. Fool ! Wait then ! Let them take you so :
Red-handed ; but confess—you slew him ; we
Are innocent.

Bolli. I wait ; but not for man.

They snatch at the body ; Bolli lifts his sword ;
Gudrun interposes, but he thrusts her aside and
falls them—then, turning, faces Gudrun.

He is dead. You have your will.

Gudrun. I am not ashamed.
He wronged my kindred—he is paid. And you—
I will be just : you have won me ; I am yours.

Bolli makes no answer, but leans over the body
of Kiartan. Gudrun gazes thereon.

'Sooth : he was very fair.

Bolli. You also, once :
Yes, once I thought so.

Gudrun. Look now ! Am I not ?
Do I look wrought, or rueful ? No ! Believe me,
I shall go home and spin twelve ells of yarn,
Deeming my day well spent,—and yours, my husband.

Liot. [Lifting his bands between Bolli and Gudrun, who are on either side of Kiartan's body] :

Your curse is this : not, coward-like, to run
To haven where perchance no haven is :

Not perish, but live and drink your lie to its dregs.

Gudrun. And mine, O Liot : my sin is more than his.

Liot. Did I not, Gudrun, bid you fear no tempest ?

Soul is the sea we sail on ; wreck has come
Of canvas large with pride, in passion's gale.

Bright was the Dawn I bade you love,—now dark ;
And dark your heritage,—the earth, the sky,
The shimmering fields and shining sea : for lo,
Your deed.

Gudrun. May Loki blind me from the sight !

Liot. Live also, you ; and drink to its dregs your pride,
Clutching at love across a gulf of woe,—

The dead white body of him who loved you both,—
And loved too late the soul-born loveliness,—
His body, blanched by you, for aye betwixt you,
Silent, as now, your last words aye unspoken.

But as for him,—these eyes have seen of old
Stars flocking in the sky by some Great Hand
Shepherded to their wattles in the west ;
But now upon my noonday darkness beam
Lights more divine, and mightier majesties :
Nor till the stars are blown out in the night

Shall any breath extinguish such a soul.
But you whose eyes still gaze upon our isle,
Lonely amid the foam of far-off seas,
Behold his fame aflame upon the clouds,
His pyre aglow upon the eternal hills !
The aurora is his watchtower in the sky ;
Iceland shall be God's acre for his bones ;
And, for his dirge and monument, behold
Her wild sea nesses and her windy walls
And hollow caverns washed with thundering waves.

EPILOGUE.

GLITTER of seas, green meadows, sun and rain,
Praise, labour, power, and aims unperfected,
The victor's laurels, and the flowers that twine
The porch of home : all these he weighed, and said :
“ Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain
Than bid you die by mine.”

Challenged, he weighed, and held them in disdain ;
For treason to Love smote all things living dead :
But dying for Love, he felt a light divine
Glow as the dear earth darkened ; whence he said :
“ Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain
Than bid you die by mine.”

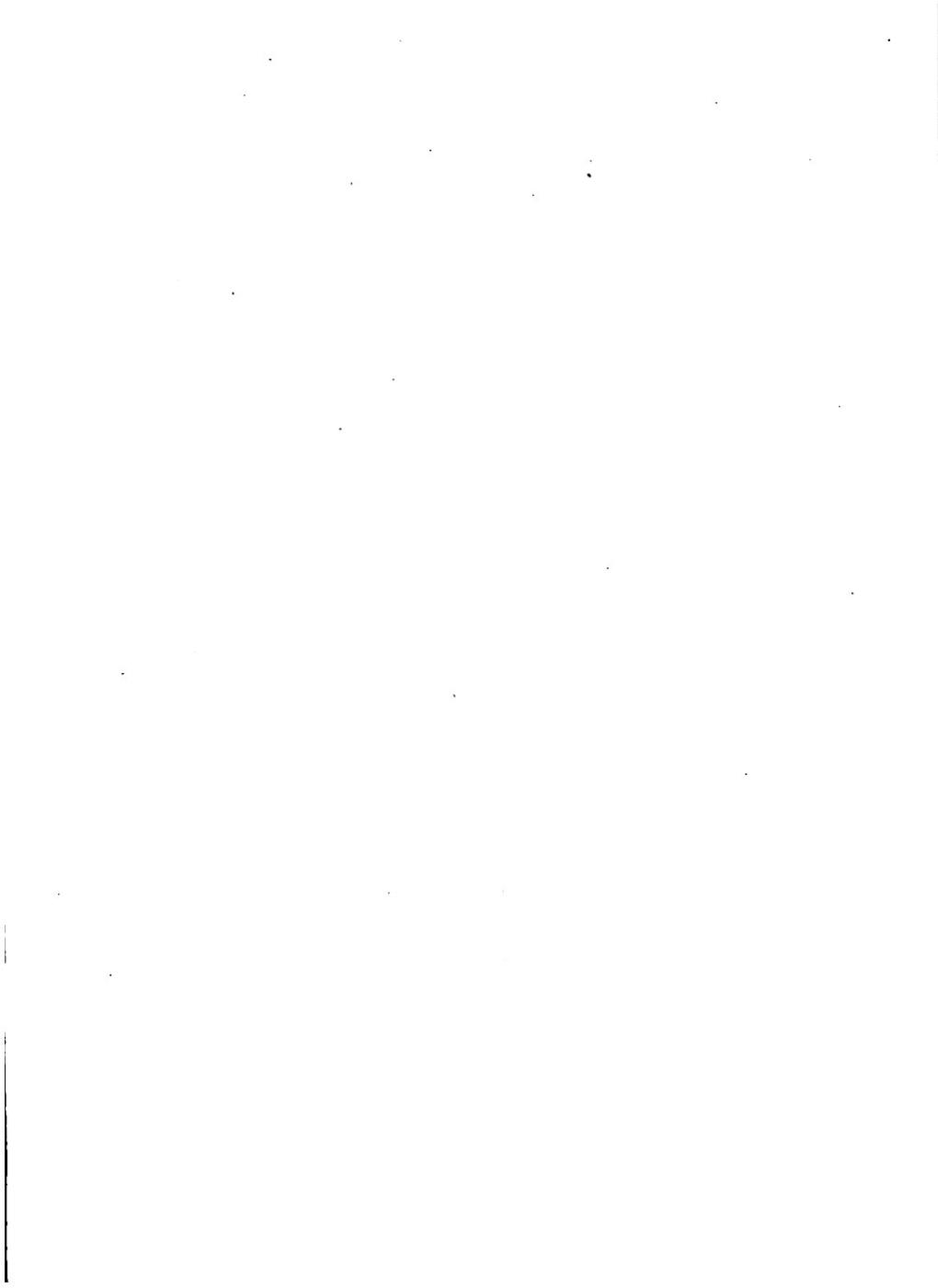
Deep from the fount of things it welled amain,—
That light which Galilee on Iceland shed,—
That god of Love which slew their gods malign,
When vengeance died of pity, and Kiartan said :
“ Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain
Than bid you die by mine.”

Time's waves, that foam, and fall and mount again,
Drown not that conquering voice. Its chords are sped
Like mighty music rolled from some far shrine,
Through secular aisles, and cloisters serpentine,—
Now ruined : but the stars burn overhead,
And in our souls the unfathomed splendours shine :
For life on loveliness is stablishèd :
Nor shall the triumph of that voice decline
Till in one diapason Man hath said :
“Brother, by your hand liefer I were slain
Than bid you die by mine.”

*...the "Save" and "Exit,"
...the "New" and "I,"*

ERRATA.

Page 15, line 4 : For "Exeunt" read "Exit."
" 99, line 13 : For "me" read "I."



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And straightens it on his knee.

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